



Small Damages

Beth Kephart

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

Small Damages

Beth Kephart

Small Damages Beth Kephart

It's senior year, and while Kenzie should be looking forward to prom and starting college in the fall, she is mourning the loss of her father. She finds solace in the one person she trusts, her boyfriend, and she soon finds herself pregnant. Kenzie's boyfriend and mother do not understand her determination to keep the baby. She is sent to southern Spain for the summer, where she will live out her pregnancy as a cook's assistant on a bull ranch, and her baby will be adopted by a Spanish couple.

Alone and resentful in a foreign country, Kenzie is at first sullen and difficult. She begins to open her eyes and her heart to the beauty that is all around her and inside of her.

Small Damages Details

Date : Published July 19th 2012 by Philomel

ISBN : 9780399257483

Author : Beth Kephart

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Romance, Travel

 [Download Small Damages ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Small Damages ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Small Damages Beth Kephart

From Reader Review Small Damages for online ebook

Jessica Keener says

This is a gorgeous book--a prose poem, lyric and sensual, and searching. There's yearning, there's love, there's a beautiful, restless yet sturdy and wise cast of characters--mostly adults and one young man who guard the narrator--Kenzie--the young woman struggling to accept the indelible impact of her actions. Kenzie lives in an ocean of memories--recent and more distant and these visions wash over her present. This aspect of time and timelessness saturates the story. Emotions gain traction with each sentence moving forward, a gathering of heart that takes you to the final, riveting end. The descriptions of landscape and food, weather, and sky will take your breath away. Everything happens in a remote town outside of Seville, Spain. I didn't want this novel to end. What a supremely gifted writer and storyteller.

Tee loves Kyle Jacobson says

First I would like to give a huge Thank You to Around The World ARC Tours for allowing me to read this book. I have to say I have never read a book like this before. It was so emotional and poignant and so true to what happens when young love goes wrong.

Kenzie has it all. She has a great boyfriend and she got accepted into a great college but there is only one hiccup to all this. See she gets pregnant and her boyfriend and mother are not happy about it. Her mother is having none of it and sends her to Spain so she can have the baby and give it up for adoption. Kenzie having no say in the matter is whisked away to Spain to have her child and give it up.

Once she is in Spain she meets Esteban and they become friends. She has a lot of time to think about things and she confides in Esteban and finds that things are not so black and white. She is angry that she never had a say so and her mother treated her like she had no choice but to read herself of that baby or destroy her life. Her boyfriend was a coward and wanted to act like nothing happened.

Once she starts thinking about things the one question remains on her mind and that is will she keep the baby? Will she be a good mother? Can she raise this baby by herself? This book tares at the heart and causes you to think about things in a different light. This is a SUMMER MUST READ! Get out your box of tissues because you are going to need them.

Grace says

You can also find this book review (and much more!) on my blog: the humble watermelon.

Books are worth nothing without a reader. But, that doesn't mean a book should feel obligated to give away its whole essence as soon as the reader has turned to the first page. A true book invites the reader to discover its potential and its nuances, while maintaining the enigma and allurement of its conception. And one of the books that does just that, without a doubt, is *Small Damages*.

Kenzie is spending the summer after her senior year in Spain, bringing with her a growing belly and an undetermined future. Her mom has sent her to avoid dealing with the public embarrassment that will come with her pregnancy, and Kenzie's boyfriend, Kevin, is failing to understand her choice and has his eyes set

more on Yale than her chocking situation. Kenzie spends her days in an old cortijo, surrounded by an eclectic array of personalities spanning from the boisterous cook, Estela, the free-spirited gypsies, and the reticent young man who spends most of his time with animals, Esteban. Here, Kenzie finds herself thinking, and observing, and discovering the parts of herself she didn't even know existed, and the parts of her herself that are becoming to be.

Small Damages has a lusciously intimate quality to it. Kephart's prose is divine: the words never speak too little or too much. The sentences never meet an edge; they are continuously weaving itself into the next, creating delicate cycles of imagery and rhythm. The prose speaks for Kenzie with honesty and heart, free from any misguided ambiguity that sometimes leaves the reader to dig for more information that doesn't exist.

"She's [Estela] changed into a dull gray dress. Her fair falls loose down her back. The skin of her arm doesn't fall from its bone. She is compact. She is complex. She is strong enough to save me". (Pg. 257)

The prose also contains an unparalleled texture created by subtle themes that speak to Spain and to Kenzie. Scenes of Estela cooking are laced with descriptions brimming with vibrant colours and exotic smells. Kenzie's insight in videography offers us glimpses in her life that otherwise would have gone undetected if she only noticed what passed before her eyes. In her words, "Sometimes, with a camcorder, you record motion. Sometimes you try to stop it. Slow it down, find the shadows, know what lies between." (Pg. 15) Finally, Kenzie's strong attachment to her late father and her best friend Ellie reflects her ultimate yearnings. She yearns for her father's unconditional affection, as all she now knows is the purposeful barrier that distances her and her mom. She yearns for Ellie's carefree, bubbly, shining personality because her untimely fate has stifled all of her dreams and desires. And so, themes in *Small Damages* are not meant to be understood with a sweeping glance of the page; they are meant to be explored and rendered into the conscious reality.

Kenzie develops incredible relationships with many characters in *Small Damages*, and although some only span a total of a dozen pages, they leave a compelling mark to the story. With Estela, Kenzie blooms as a cook, as a woman, and as a human being. Estela is demanding and seemingly unnerving but in reality, her big heart and humanity help Kenzie understand and notice the unbiased small stories that lay the foundation of a person's character. With Esteban, Kenzie finds a sincere connection and a welcoming voice. They have one of the rawest relationships I have ever had the luck to encounter in a fictitious book. When they are together, they exude such a forbidden naivety that is almost too pure for love.

"Are you okay? Esteban asks me.
Not really.
But you will be.
That's what everyone says, Esteban, but how do you know? How can you know? Nothing's okay, and it can't be.
Because I've been watching you, he says. He steps toward me and touches my lips. Come back later, he says. If you want." (Pg. 215)

Small Damages is a coming-of-age story of the most riveting and quiet of proportions. But it is also an old love story from ravaged times, a boy's quiet grieving and woodland dreams, a mother's attempt to sterilize

the past. It is Spain at its brightest and its darkest. It is the story of human resiliency and tenderness. And so, dive into *Small Damages* with an open heart. And if you choose to bare your soul to it, it shall bare its soul to you back.

First review, written in August of 2013

I think I might have to re-read this.

And maybe re-read it once more.

Because I don't think I have fully grasped onto all of what this book has to offer me. (Hence the four stars.)

"You aren't happy," Estela says.

"I can't be happy," I say.

"Look at me, Kenzie."

"I'm looking at you, Estela."

"Do you know your own heart?"

"I don't know anything."

"Go," she says, "and think. And don't come back until you know."

There's so much beauty and art behind words, behind a story. And there are many ways one can interpret the writing. You could read the snippet above in a rushed tone, imagining the characters speaking in a hush, their breaths mingling into the crisp air. Yet you could also read it like a stream flowing calmly, with a powerful undertone, as it leads to a dramatic waterfall with the last sentence. There's nothing else quite like it, and *Small Damages* brings out the best of it.

Cuddling into my soft pillow, this book in my hand, Spain's soul around me. I wouldn't trade it for anything else in the world.

Pam Victorio says

Kephart has cemented herself as one of my most favorite writers in the universe. This is a very small list and she is at the top. *Small Damages* is absolutely amazing from the setting, to the MC, to her decisions and all of the side things that force her along throughout this generous plot. Hands down the best book I've read in 2012.

Nafiza says

I loved this book. A lot. I got my mother to read it and she loved it as well. A lot.

Now, before I start this review, I will say that people who like books in which there are lots of action and things happen will probably not be happy with this book. Not many things happen in this book. If I were to describe it to you using my own words, I'd say this book is a journey of internal growth, a retrospection of life and love. An investigation on what it means to be a mother and what it means to have a mother. A journey into yourself to find the person you always were and to coax her out into the world. This is a story about finding a family that has ties deeper than blood and the colour of your skin. And above all, this book is a love letter to Spain. You cannot read this book without wanting to go to Spain and experience life the way it is narrated here.

The strongest part about *Small Damages* is its writing. The prose is so exquisitely beautiful that I, for the life of me, cannot cull out one sentence or paragraph to share – okay, here's a tiny bit:

“The day is collapsing into dusk. The Gypsies in their white shirts are the only lamps. The moon is coming in like a pan on fire.” (164)

The style of the prose is somewhat stream of consciousness paired with a lyricism that gives it an almost hypnotizing cadence. This is no purple prose but genuine lyrical prose that is anchored by the skein of sincerity and honesty that befits the character. Kenzie is a pregnant teen sent away by her mother to have her baby and then give it up for adoption to a Spanish couple. The book is addressed to the child. Kenzie's voice is fresh, melancholy and at the time same, a bit hopeful. There is angst but of a different flavor than the usual. The angst is dampened by the grief that is so apparent in her words. She has lost her father and she can't lose the baby because it contains a bit of her father. The loss here is not imparted by the tears (which are frequent) but the quietness in the book.

And then there are the characters. Every single character in this novel is beautifully etched out. Estela is perhaps my favourite character but she is not the only one who shines. The gypsies, the silent boy who watches Kenzie, the various other adults, even the people who want to adopt Kenzie's child – they all seem to occupy tangible space, they are that detailed. And then there is the gradual pace of the book – the book is slow and the things that happen are internal. The setting is a character in its own right – vivid, vibrant and demanding an emotional return for its beauty.

This book, you guys, is lovely. It takes realistic fiction and gives it a whimsical twist. It takes grief, fear and all other heavy emotions and filters them through the lenses of a beautiful and strange place. This is one of the few instances when the cover of the book totally matches the story inside. I recommend this to you if you want something introspective, quiet and beautiful.

Keertana says

Rating: 4.5 Stars

Small Damages is a quiet tale, filled with a languid prose that not many readers will enjoy. It reads practically like a verse novel, for its lines are so very poetic, but at its heart, it is a story that cannot be explained but one that can only be felt. Admittedly, I didn't expect to enjoy *Small Damages* as much as I did. It is a story of an eighteen-year-old girl, Kenzie, who is sent to Spain to give birth to her child so as to save her widowed mother the shame of dealing with a pregnant daughter. Yet, although *Small Damages* deals with teenage pregnancy, an issue I've always seen as been very black-and-white, more than anything else, it is a coming of age tale of finding yourself and learning what you truly want from life.

What makes *Small Damages* such an impactful novel is, first and foremost, its prose, but also its general story arc. It starts out with Kenzie staying in Spain, living in a house with Estela, a hardened old cook, and Esteban, a quiet boy who has a way with birds and horses. Kenzie is in Spain to give up her child to a family that desperately wants one and to spare both her mother and boyfriend from having to deal with what has happened to Kenzie, especially as she refuses to abort her child. Kenzie is a quiet heroine, strong in nature and contemplative in spirit. Unlike the kick-ass heroines who grace the pages of adventure novels, bravely slaying beasts, Kenzie tackles her inner demons, a journey which I find infinitely more powerful than any other.

Seville, Spain is the setting of our story and through Kephart's writing, it comes alive through the pages. You

see, reading this book feels much like living in Spain yourself, eating the foreign food, smelling the earthy smells, and seeing the cultural aspects that make it a unique nation. As such, Kenzie's experience in Spain is felt all the more vividly for the setting of her story plays an important role throughout the novel. Kenzie, too, is a heroine we cannot help but sympathize with. Over the past year, she has lost her father, the one person in the world she was ever close to, and her mother has insisted on moving on, shoving her father's things into remote locations in the house, pretending as if he never existed.

It is then that we see Kevin, Kenzie's boyfriend and the father of her child, appear and help her through her rough times. It is him and her close circle of friends who are always with her, supporting her, and better than anyone else, Kevin knows what Kenzie needs even without her having to say it. But, when it came to the issue of Kenzie's pregnancy, Kevin, bound for Yale in just a few months, refused to come with her to Spain. Now, alone in a foreign country with a cook who is harsh and a boy who won't talk, Kenzie is lost, confused, and feels unloved. It is only her baby which keeps her going, keeps her putting one step in front of the other. Although it is very subtle, this bond of mother-child is gently built up throughout the novel, making even teenagers feel the wonder of what it is like to have a child, despite never having been pregnant.

Nevertheless, despite all these beautiful qualities, from Kenzie's personality to the scenery to her slow bond with her child, what makes *Small Damages* the novel it is are its characters. As the story wears on, Estela slowly opens up to Kenzie, becoming the mother-figure she always wanted but never had. Estela has a brutal past of her own, filled with unrequited love, but she is a strong figure, indomitable in her strength and a constant pillar for Kenzie to lean on, unlike her mother ever was. It is their relationship that truly spoke to me the most. In addition to Estela, Kenzie forms an interesting bond with the surrogate mother of her child. Kenzie, insistent on meeting who will be the eventual parents of her daughter, must now also come to terms with the idea of giving up a part of herself – a part of her father, who she so desperately loved and misses – to someone else entirely.

Small Damages is an extremely thoughtful book. In it, Kenzie is forced to think about what she wants from life – her mother's understanding, her boyfriend's support, or something else entirely – but along the way, she finds people whom she can trust, more than her own friends, and who trust her, more than her own family. In other words, Kenzie finds a place to belong in Spain and that, in my eyes, is where the true beauty of this tale lies. Of course, there is a very gentle romance, first springing up as a mutual friendship between Esteban and Kenzie, but truly, I hesitate to call it love. It is something special for sure, but more than that, it is a feeling. Kephart has written a novel where the word "love" is never necessary because you can feel the palpable affection so clearly. In fact, her whole book is like this – one feeling after another, meshing together to make a collage that looks, surprisingly enough, like life and the beauty it holds.

You can read this review and more on my blog, Ivy Book Bindings.

Melissa Stacy says

DNF on page 133, at 44%

A 2012 YA contemporary, "Small Damages" is set in southern Spain, and stars an 18-year-old high school senior named Kenzie who would much rather be hanging out with her friends at the Jersey shore. Kenzie was sent to Spain by her mother, who wanted to hide Kenzie's unplanned pregnancy from everyone they know in America, and give the baby away in some kind of shady adoption, because like, NO ONE CAN KNOW Kenzie was having the sexy times with her boyfriend. **The shame.** Apparently, Kenzie's mother would've been super-embarrassed in front of all her PTA friends if they ever found out her daughter was pregnant, and that would've been a real tragedy.

Near the very end of "Small Damages," the reader finally discovers this novel is set in 1995. But that really took me by surprise, since there's a scene early on in the book in which Kenzie calls her boyfriend from a pharmacy, right after peeing on a stick in a public restroom and finding out she was pregnant -- and Kenzie seemed to have a cell phone in that scene. So I thought this novel was set in 2006 or 2008.

Regardless of my initial confusion, 1995 is a long, long way from the 1950s and '60s, when families went to great lengths to send their unwed pregnant daughters away from home to have their babies in secret. Kenzie lives a very modern, edgy lifestyle at home in Jersey, her boyfriend has been accepted to attend Yale, her friends are all cool and hip and kinda wild, her parental situation is chaotic, at best -- there is simply no way I believe this "secret preggers journey to Spain" could ever have happened. The story details here just didn't add up. Being ashamed in front of your PTA friends doesn't justify all the secretive scheming at work in this plot.

I was hoping to read some lyrical escapism fiction packed with beautiful details of Spain. And I hoped the characters would speak Spanish, or discuss Spanish language, or reflect on Spanish history or the landscape in interesting ways.

None of which happened. Of the first 133 pages of this novel, most of the scenes are backstory, describing how Kenzie came to be in southern Spain. Even though the novel introduces Kenzie in Spain, those initial pages prove to be story-hooks without substance. While Kenzie frequently points out there are oranges in southern Spain, and people say "Buenos tardes" about 58 times in this book, the repetition was as tiresome as the setting details were scant. Kenzie pines for her boyfriend, her friends, and the Jersey shore, as she ruminates on her life in America and how much she misses America.

There are some Spanish Gypsies who appear. The description of these people felt overly exotic and Othering. Given that Kenzie isn't actively trying to improve her Spanish or learn more about Spanish culture at all, I really wish the Spanish Gypsies hadn't been in the story -- they felt like "an exotic story detail" to interest readers in this nonsensical plot.

The true beating heart of this book is the fact that Kenzie is really, really connected to her developing fetus, and she wants to be a mother. She addresses her fetus as "you" throughout the novel, and Kenzie's awareness and vocabulary of pregnancy and motherhood sounded much more like a woman of thirty than a teenager in high school.

The prose of "Small Damages" is literary, and the sentences are crafted with care, and meant to be poetic. But the problematic content really damages the entire flow of this book, as does the cumbersome repetition. The author uses a handful of Spanish words and phrases over and over, and Kenzie never translates the occasional complicated line of Spanish the Gypsies use in conversation. Since those lines of Spanish were plot-related and relevant to important characterization details, I found this highly frustrating. Kenzie tells the reader she speaks Spanish in the book, though it is only ever written in English -- except when she says, "Buenos tardes" -- which she and the other characters use a lot.

Given what I read of Kenzie, I would say that she harnesses the strength of her inner 30-year-old who is hungry for a baby, and decides to keep her child by the end of this book. So if you are a reader who also hungers for a baby and wants to read a YA novel in which a teenager makes the decision to become a mother at eighteen -- then you would probably enjoy "Small Damages" a lot more than I did.

I picked up this book hoping to read about a young person in Spain, a young person who was hopefully speaking Spanish and learning more about Spanish culture, and what I got instead was this very adult-sounding woman ruminating over the Jersey shore and her growing fetus. This was just not for me.

Gray Cox says

"It's a girl," I say.

"Si. Congratulations."

"She would have been my daughter," I say, and I start to cry, and suddenly I can't stop crying.

Lemons and limes, such a smol hopeful book, take all of my stars just like you stole my heart. xx

Lainey says

There are several I loved about this book: first of all, southern Spain. Lovely, lovely, lovely. I visited Spain once and I loved it, the architecture, the people, the paella. Reading about Seville and the countryside with its olive trees and sunflowers kindles the old wanderlust.

Kenzie is also my kind of book tourist. There's a certain kind of book tourist I hate, of which there are lots of examples in YA, where a teenager is packed off by mom or dad to some foreign destination and hates it because *you're taking me away from my friends!* or some such complaint. I'm sorry but it's annoying. If you can't appreciate Paris because you're too busy sulking I won't read about it.

There is certainly a part of Kenzie that resents being sent by her mother to Spain to hide her pregnancy but she doesn't ignore the world around her nor is she apathetic to its beauty, she's observant in a way a good photographer or videographer is. It's evident from the details we get: the oranges in the bathtub, the way the sun bleaches a landscape of color, the cats around the *cortijo*. There are lots beautiful images in this book.

There are also some passages about the dishes that Estela, the cook of Los Nietos, prepares which would appeal to someone like me who watches The Food Network for the food porn. There's a scene where Estela is making paella and Kenzie is filming her, Estela asks her to put down the camera and Kenzie refuses. Yeah, If I see someone making paella, I'd also want to record it.

My only problem with the book is that some of the characters are not fully realized. Maybe the author is only giving us what we need to know or maybe, since the novel is written in the first-person, Kenzie is still trying to understand them. However I'm not so sure because sometimes there was more telling than showing. Like with Kenzie's group of friends. I think the author tried to give each of them distinct personalities but they didn't seem like real people to me and I didn't care about any of them. Kenzie obviously cares about them but aside from the fact that she says they're close, I don't get why. There's also Kevin, her boyfriend and the father of the baby. In the flashbacks, he seemed like a thoughtful and generous guy. But his actions when Kenzie gets pregnant show him to be a selfish coward. Nobody is asking him to throw his future away but he should at least assume some responsibility. I don't get why Kenzie still doesn't hate his guts.

The characters in the *cortijo* are better handled I think although they could still use more development. There's Esteban who works with the horses and Kenzie is obviously falling for him. It's easy to see why, he's sympathetic and honest and he listens to her. However the shift in their relationship is a little abrupt. At first their conversations are limited to single sentences then all of a sudden there's all these details and childhood stories. I'm not complaining about the details, just that it was sudden.

Estela, I think is better realized which makes sense since Kenzie spends most of her time with her. There's all these scenes of her cooking, beating eggs and mixing and frying and it's easy to see her as this very efficient woman, maybe a little bitter but nevertheless loves the makeshift family around her. Miguel, the owner of

Los Nietos, is an interesting figure. He loves the bulls he raises, they die in the ring but he feels proud of them. There are also some Gypsies in the cortijo, singing songs and coming up with strange cures however aside from Angelita, I don't think the author bothered to distinguish one from the other which is a pity.

In conclusion, as a travel journal the book is almost perfect however as a novel some of the characters could do with some work and maybe some scenes could have been longer because I always felt like there was more that was happening and there was more to be said when suddenly it cuts. Overall, it could have benefited from being a longer book.

Reynje says

Small Damages is a gentle, quiet novel about love, grief and regret. Eighteen year old Kenzie is pregnant, grieving, at a crossroad in her life, when her mother arranges for Kenzie to travel to Spain for the eventual birth and adoption of her child. Kenzie finds herself at a bull ranch, isolated and resentful, and begins to reflect on the choices she has made, the choices that lie ahead, and the relationships that frame her life.

Small Damages is a very internal novel; the plot is slight, secondary to the character development and exploration of the relationships between the central characters. Kenzie's voice is initially detached: still raw with the loss of her father, the distance from her mother, the displacement from her former life. She feels keenly chasm of silence that has opened up between her boyfriend and friends, the weight of secrecy. Alone, essentially dismissed by her mother, aware that her boyfriend already has one foot in his future, Kenzie's life at the ranch feels like exile, banishment from a former life.

Kephart's writing is spare and lyrical, given to vivid description of the setting. There's a palpable sense of place in the novel: the heat and silence of the cortijo, the colour and sound of Seville. While using a light hand with dialogue, Kephart's characterisation is strong, conveyed through movement, gestures, colour, touch. Small, important moments between the characters are often quiet, notable for the lack of conversation, built on what goes unsaid. Then there's the relationship between Kenzie and Estela, the way their stories wind around each other's, the way their interactions change as the story progresses and Estela opens up about her past. It's this bond that feels the most profound in the novel, the gradual understanding and affinity that develops between the two women, the past and the present merging.

There is an open-endedness to Small Damages, in that not of the initial conflicts are neatly resolved. And yet there's also a sense of closure, in that Kenzie reaches a place of peace, of certainty in her decision. Initially resistant to the people, the place, Kenzie develops bonds with what initially seemed the very obstacles to her happiness. There is solace in the peace of the ranch, in the Estela's kitchen, in the music and superstitions of the gypsies, in the quiet boy Esteban, who carries a grief of his own. In coming to know the place, the people, their lives, Kenzie begins to understand herself, her relationships, and what she wants her life to be.

Kephart's lilting narrative style may require some adjustment for those accustomed to a more dense or conversational approach; the gradual pace of the story, too, might lack the plot-progression expected. However, Small Damages is a strong, beautiful novel in its own right, a story as much about love in its various manifestations, as what it costs to love, and to lose.

Isamlq says

Reading Small Damages was different... with not much actually going on in the present save recollections of the past and considerations of what should be... what could be?

it's reminiscent of ck kelly martin and all her stuff; this with all the soft sweet bitter and hard in it. plus people being people, of choosing and having choices made for them.

A lot is on the fuzzy side here:

- the who she is...
- the what kind of girl she is...
- and even the who *they* all are to her.

But we find out, like pictures slowly gaining clarity.. we see things through her eyes and hear through her words. And her voice? it held nothing back: angry at some and disappointed in others... sometimes both at herself so that there's an unavoidable honesty to her.

Better, I liked how there were parallels with her and the rest so that it's not just about the dilemma she's in, but the things that led up to it. Doing it that way, made all of them more real. That she's not just a girl dealing with a decision, but one who takes with her everything else: a father she loved best, a mother trying, and friends... with them she's more but less too as she proves herself able to be selfish and bitter.

...simply because she's not perfect.

None of them are.
And that right there?

That's perfect.

Heather says

Read all my reviews at The Flyleaf Review:)

Because I haven't read any other books by Kephart (and she has a very impressive array of work under her belt) and because I didn't read any reviews of Small Damages beforehand, I started this book completely blank. I wasn't sure what to expect from her. What I discovered, from page one, is that Beth Kephart is one of those rare breeds that can take a collection of words and construct them in way that almost paints an image. Beth Kephart, like some of my very favorite authors, puts words to paper like an artist puts paint to canvas. I think if I could pick one author that reminds me the most of the way Kephart writes it would be Gayle Forman. Like Forman, Kephart's writing is deeply emotive. Her words evoke visual images. I don't just mean in the way she describes things. It's more than that. Her writing is descriptive but it also has a quality to it that sets a tone or mood. Her expressions are subtle and nuanced. She has written prose, but with a very poetic quality to it.

"When I open the door, a nun blackbirds by, and I keep walking out into the air, which smells like fruit and sun and the color blue; it smells like blue in Seville."

See what I mean? This passage came from page five. Once I read that, I knew I was hooked. And the book just got better.

When we first meet Kenzie, she is newly arrived in Seville, Spain and is about to set off for Los Nietos, the farmhouse (or cortijo) owned by Miguel, a friend of a friend of Kenzie's mother, who has agreed to take her in until her child is born. The child will then be adopted by a couple Miguel knows and Kenzie will return to the States and start college in the fall. To say Kenzie is in a bad place would be an understatement. Not only is she pregnant, she recently lost her father, who in her own words, was her favorite. The father of Kenzie's baby, Kevin, while not a bad guy, has decided to let Kenzie handle things on her own, in effect taking himself out of the equation by refusing to accompany Kenzie to Spain. Worse still, Kenzie and Kevin told no one, not even their very close knit group of friends, about the pregnancy. The only other person who knows is her mother, who proceeded to spirit Kenzie away for the summer until the baby is born and then plans to bring her home and act as if nothing ever happened. It is the way her mother deals with life's hardships. It's the way she dealt with Kenzie's dad's death, she grieved for a brief period of time, then swept it under the rug. Kenzie, however, is not like her mother.

I loved the character of Kenzie. She is just one of many complicated characters found within the pages of *Small Damages*. The majority of the book is written in the "now" but we do get to see what happened in the past, from the time just before Kenzie's dad's death up to the discovery of her pregnancy. It's not only an effective way to tell the story, but it also shows the reader the person Kenzie once was, and the person she's become since. Before, Kenzie was happy and part of a loving, supportive group of friends. But because she and Kevin chose not to tell anyone about the baby, she has isolated herself from that support. Her mom packing her off to Spain further cemented that isolation. The Kenzie we meet now is sad, angry, confused, resentful and frustrated. She feels helpless and out of control, and most of all, she feels alone and far way from home. She's just biding her time at the cortijo, growing more surly and frustrated every day.

"And that's it. That's it today; I can't stand it. I can't stand being here, on my own, invisible but also growing larger. I stumble from bed and shower in the cold water I can't get used to--let the cold, cold water burn. I throw on a dress, head down the hall, cut through the courtyard, and it's like I'm nowhere, like I'm already gone, like I will be gone four months from now. She was here then she wasn't. Pretend it never happened. Under the tiled arch, down the chalk of road, I walk...

It's sunflowers in the fields instead of bulls. It's houses nobody lives in, horses nobody rides, a man on a mule trotting by. It's abandoned wells and steam on the horizon, a cat crossing the road, and I can't get enough distance."

One of the ways she deals with this loneliness is by speaking to her unborn child, and in fact the whole book seems to be a conversation between Kenzie and the baby. I think it's in these small moments, when she's addressing the baby, that I fell in love with Kenzie. Even though she acts bratty and petulant at times, as a mother, I still found that I could relate to her and sympathize with her through these interactions with her unborn child.

[Read the Entire Review](#)

Florinda says

The catalog copy for *SMALL DAMAGES* describes it as “JUNO meets *UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN*,” and I suppose that’s an effective shorthand. The sun here is in Spain rather than northern Italy, and Kenzie Spitzer is less in control of her situation than Juno MacGuff (and also less blessed with supportive parents)--but if you need to give a point of reference, it’ll do.

The whole idea of sending a pregnant teenager away until she has given birth--and given away her baby to adoptive parents, so that she can then return home from her mysterious trip and pick up her life where she left off--is an oddly old-fashioned one, and while the novel is clearly contemporary, its time frame isn’t quite current. It’s also an interesting angle on the question of “choice” debate, in which adoption seems to be the least-discussed choice much of the time--but unlike Juno, Kenzie doesn’t feel much ownership of this particular choice. Feeling resentful and out of control, her stay in Spain seems like exile, and her inadequate knowledge of the language is only one source of her discomfort as she struggles to come to terms with the turns her life has taken.

Beth Kephart, on the other hand, seems to operate very comfortably within this foreign setting, and *SMALL DAMAGES* is among her best work. Having said that, even less-stellar Beth Kephart is still pretty darn good, but I think this is her richest, most resonant novel since *THE HEART IS NOT A SIZE* (also set in a Spanish-speaking country). It’s not hard to get caught up in the beauty of Kephart’s writing--well-constructed, evocative description is among her particular strengths--but the story she’s telling here is particularly engaging. Her Kenzie isn’t always easy to like--she’s angry, confused, and comes off a bit spoiled at times--but her emotional growth over the course of the novel is convincing. Her voice is distinctive--less articulate than some of the author’s prior teenage protagonists (or Juno MacGuff, for that matter), maybe, but that suits both her general confusion and the foreign-ness of her setting. Influential cross-generational relationships are becoming another hallmark of Kephart’s fiction; her teens struggle with their parents (one of whom may be absent or dead), but there are grandparent surrogates who play important roles, like the elderly lesbian neighbors in *YOU ARE MY ONLY* and Kenzie’s cooking teacher/guardian Estela here. Kenzie and Estela’s relationship develops believably from mutual irritation to real affection, and significantly affects Kenzie’s decisions later in the novel.

I’ve called several of Beth Kephart’s books “the best one yet”--and I’m saying it again, but something feels different about *SMALL DAMAGES*. I think it brings the author’s gifts as writer and storyteller (which are not always synonymous or co-occurring things) together more effectively than any of her earlier fiction has, and I feel that it will stay with me longer. If you haven’t gotten around to reading Beth Kephart yet, start here--*SMALL DAMAGES* is one of the best books I’ve read this year.

Estelle says

It’s both the best and the worst feeling when you pick up a book you bought years ago, and fall head over heels for it. Say hello to *Small Damages* — it’s a total beauty.

We have Kenzie, a senior in high school, who has recently lost her father. A new relationship with her best guy friend comes soon after, which leads to this unexpected pregnancy. Her mom’s resolution — pretty immediately — is to send her off to Spain until her delivery, and organize an adoption with a couple out there before Kenzie returns home. She is unhappy to be plucked in her life with Philadelphia, but, moreso, because her mother never stops to ask her what she wants.

My mother’s side is Spanish and I have been dreaming of going to Spain since I was in middle school but

nothing has awakened that desire quite like Beth Kephart's beautiful, lush descriptions from the sidewalks to the land to the smells to the people. I found myself wanting to dive back into the book for the setting as much as for Kenzie and her story. That's saying something.

Smack dab in the middle of Seville is Estela, the cook Kenzie lives with and assist with her food and her shaky English. (Truthfully, she was the reason I bought the book. My name!) She's brash and pushy and, at first, it's tough for Kenzie to get used to that. But it's good because Estela helps her get out of her own head by giving her something else to focus on — fake parties, amazing sounding food, and her own story. I didn't know what to expect of this relationship at first, but, as I get further in, their time in the kitchen felt like a unique therapy session for both of them.

This book is so much about grief and trust. Kenzie is struggling to deal with the death of her dad, and how her mom has changed since then. She's always flashing back to her friends, and her relationship with her boyfriend. What are they up to now? Are they thinking of her? How is she suddenly the girl who does everything wrong when all she used to do was right? She's grieving the girl she used to be, and, already, the person she will be when she's back in Philly. Kenzie talks to her child so much. It's so lovely but it hurts so much too because you know what the plan is, you know what everyone is expecting her to do. This is where the trust comes in. Can she trust that her mom knows what's best for her? Does she even trust herself?

I can say with confidence that Small Damages is one of the most gorgeous, heartbreaking stories I've ever read. I would not hesitate when buying it for the people in my life. The prose is so lovely; it wrapped me up and had me feeling so cozy, so into the story. Sure, it's a little succinct and not as developed as it could have been but I liked the mystery; I liked how my own imagination was set free. It felt right. And the supporting characters? I adored watching how they slowly became Kenzie's support system. So much to love, so much to highlight, and a book that I will definitely be rereading in the future.

-- review first posted on Rather Be Reading Blog.

Lauren says

Find a similar review here: <http://www.loveisnotatriangle.com/201...>

The streets of Seville are the size of sidewalks, and there are alleys leaking off from the streets.

When I read that sentence, my heart started racing, I got chills, and I KNEW I was going to love this book because of the writing alone. I was not disappointed. The descriptive language in Small Damages is gorgeous. I could feel the heat and the dust of the country, see the crowds of Seville and hear the gypsy music play. The way Kenzie describes her surroundings also mirrors her mood throughout the book. It is desolate and depressing at first, and then gradually the beauty of the landscape comes out as Kenzie's mindset changes.

"You aren't happy," Estella says.

"I can't be happy," I say.

"Look at me, Kenzie."

"I'm looking at you, Estella."

"Do you know your own heart?"

"I don't know anything."

Small Damages is another one of those quiet books that looks inside someone. It's the story about the choices we make and about knowing our hearts. It is Kenzie's journey to figure out what is important to her. What

really matters. And to be brave enough to live it.

Kenzie is a high school graduate who wants to be a filmmaker, and when the story begins it's like someone has pressed the pause button on her life. She tells her friends she's in Spain to have an adventure. She'll have a baby instead. She'll go to college second semester. No one will know.

Sometimes with a camcorder, you record motion. Sometimes you try to stop it. Slow it down, find the shadows, know what lies between.

It's like Kenzie is in this place just waiting for a little while, but soon her life will resume again. There are times that she'll hit the rewind button to play scenes from her past, but she isn't moving forward.

But then at some point in the story the camera starts to record and Kenzie begins to live again.

This is my movie beginning.

This is my life.

You don't have to leave to be free.

Part of the beauty of Small Damages is its form - that it's told entirely in Spain. But I wish we'd seen more of Kenzie coming out of that place. I know the story is about Kenzie taking care of herself, but for her character's growth, I wanted to see her deal with some things from her past that she regretted. I understand that it would have messed with the flow of the story, but there were some people I wanted her to talk to - even if it had been only a letter written.

I love all the characters we meet in Small Damages. And I especially love the way that Estela and the Gypsies' stories flow into Kenzie's. An extremely subtle, lovely romance exists in this book as well. It is exactly my favorite kind.

Cover: I usually ignore them, but this is a story that I judged incorrectly based on the cover alone. Although the colors are pretty, I kept looking at it and thinking this book was a lot racier than it is (because at first glance it looks like two people in bed). But it's not that kind of book at all.
