



## 27 Magic Words

*Sharelle Byars Moranville*

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An irrepressible eleven-year-old with a vibrant imagination must reconcile her fantasies with reality in this beautifully written novel about facing the future.

Although Kobi's parents sailed into a storm at sea five years ago, she knows they are alive. If she says "Avanti!" she can see them. Now that her life is being turned upside down again, she will need the magic words her mother left behind more than ever. Instead of living with wealthy Grandmamma in Paris, Kobi and her sister will temporarily stay in Des Moines, Iowa. There, the girls will, as Uncle Wim puts it, "live like normal kids for a change." To fit in at her new school Kobi tells lies that soon catch up with her.

In a heart-wrenching climax, she must confront not only the untruths she has told others but the stories she has made herself believe. Only then will she be able to grieve for her parents and move on with her life.

## 27 Magic Words Details

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## From Reader Review 27 Magic Words for online ebook

### Velvet says

A very irrepressible ten-year-old with a vibrant imagination who has a goal to reconcile her fantasies with reality in this beautifully written novel about facing the future.

Although Kobi's parents sailed into a storm at sea five years ago, she knows they are alive. If she says the word Avanti she can see them. Now that her life has been turned upside down again, she will need the magic words her mother left behind more than ever (great read). Instead of living with wealthy Grandmamma in Paris, Kobi and her sister will temporarily stay in Des Moines, Iowa. There, the girls will, as Uncle Wim puts it, live like normal kids for a change. To fit in at her new school Kobi tells lies that soon catch up with her, very, very interesting... but good!

In a heart-wrenching climax, she must confront not only the untruths she has told others but the stories she has made herself believe. Only then will she be able to grieve for her parents and move on with her life.

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### Patricia says

The magic in the words that Kobi's mother writes for her—"Avanti," "Frippery," "Carillon"—is in the love of a mother for her daughter and right back. Kobi is five when she gets her magic, written on 27 separate Post-it notes, and the book takes place when she is ten and trying to live with the loss of both of her beloved parents. She evokes the words when she needs them—"Avanti" transports her to an imaginary world in which her parents are happily stranded on a tropical island. "Hogwash" helps her deal with mean girls in her new school after she moves from Paris to Des Moines. Moranville deftly and lovingly takes issues of death, grief and loss and weaves them into a touching story of a girl facing life in big and small ways. I also commend the publisher, Holiday House, and cover artist Victoria Antolini for taking such good care of this book—it is as beautiful to look at as it is to read.

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### Karina says

\*Thank You To The Publisher For This Review Copy\*

I would give this book a million stars if I could!!  
It was spectacular! <3 <3

Because of her mother, a writer, and her father a magician, Kobi has grown up learning that words are magic!

But a few years later, they go on a boating trip and never return!

Kobi and Brooke adjust to their life in Paris. But gets turned upside down when her grandmother tells her and her sister Brooke they will be living with their Uncle Wim in Des Moines, Iowa.

Staying there until Christmas, both Brooke + Kobi must adjust to their new life.

Brook suffers as well from not only the loss of her parents, but from constant worry over her sister Kobi by making herself feel safe through obsessive compulsive behaviors!

So she turns to the 27 Magic Words her mother wrote to her on post its some years ago to comfort her in difficult situations from learning about her grandmother's illness, adjusting to her older sister becoming more independent & facing the truth about the whereabouts of her parents.

But one special word "Avanit!" gives her the opportunity to see her parents on a small island, where she believes they are stranded and finding a way to come home!

The writing style is whimsical and delivers a certain magic but never takes the reader out of the story. The plot keeps the reader connected not only to Kobi's journey from beginning to end, but also all the main/supporting characters that are written with such depth.

The true magic of this novel is not only through the rich characters and the beautiful writing style, but also the captivating plot that discusses grief, family, and the trials and tribulations of growing up!

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### **Kimberly Karalius says**

I'm so glad I visited Holiday House's table at ALA and got this little gem of a story. It's very sweet and I loved the bits and pieces of magic in it.

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### **Maggie Ignasiak says**

I cannot wait for this book's official release so I can start recommending it to my patrons. It's original, whimsical, and very fun. I like the thin line between imagination and perceived reality, which makes this a book suitable for all ages.

I received this book as an ARC.

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### **Chelsea Couillard-Smith says**

This gentle exploration of grief was a pleasant surprise to me. While the reviews were very positive, no one has been talking much about it, yet I'd call it one of my favorite reads of the year.

For five years, Kobi and her sister Brook have lived an unquestionably privileged (and rather old-fashioned) lifestyle in Paris with their wealthy Grandmama since their parents vanished at sea. But now, with their Grandmama getting remarried and hoping to embark on an extended honeymoon, the two girls are sent to live with their uncle in Iowa temporarily. Kobi struggles to adjust to attending real school for the first time,

telling lies about her parents and some aspects of her life in order to fit in. Brook has an easier time, but both girls must get used to living with a bachelor in a practically unfurnished house after years of their Grandmama's cooking and luxurious lifestyle. It would be easy for some readers to be turned off by the spoiled little rich girl story, but Byars does a masterful job of making both Kobi and Brook relatable and sympathetic. Their grief over the loss of their parents is still achingly raw, and their fear over losing the only other family they know, Grandmama, feels entirely natural. While their privilege is undeniable, these are two girls who have lost much, and who continue to be shuttled around by the adults in their lives without much say. Any child can relate to the feeling of powerlessness of adults making all the decisions, and while Grandmama and Uncle Wim are clearly trying to do their best, readers will sympathize with the instability and sense of loss that Kobi and Brook feel so acutely.

Byars adds a touch of magic to the story, too - their father was a magician, and their mother, a writer, left 27 words for Kobi that she truly believes can affect the course of everyday life. She even relies on one of them to see what she believes to be her parents, shipwrecked on a desert island. As Kobi's facade begins to crack under the stress of her new life, a nicely executed twist (that some readers may anticipate), illuminates the depths of Kobi's grief, and adds further complexity to her relationships with her family and friends. All the characters are nicely realized, adults and children alike, and Byars manages to weave in numerous complicated issues, from OCD to dementia to changing relationships between parents and children, without the book feeling overstuffed or glossing over complexity.

Understated, emotionally authentic, and gentle, with memorable characters and a great depth of feeling, this is a quietly lovely book, and one that I hope more young readers pick up. Not overly dark, and respectful of young readers, it should find a broad audience.

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### **Mike DeAnda says**

Ten-year-old Kobi Alighieri and her older sister Brook have had a quiet life in Paris with their Grandmamma since their parents disappeared five years ago. They are home-schooled, eat French delicacies, and live in a beautiful apartment. But when their grandmother decides to marry her friend Mr. Gyver and take an extended wedding trip, everything changes. Grandmamma escorts Kobi and Brook to the United States to live with her son Wim. Uncle Wim is nothing like his mother. His house is simple and not particularly clean, and he doesn't seem to know what to do with two girls. He enlists his girlfriend Sally Hancock to watch them after school, and they meet her mom, a world-famous artist who suffers from dementia. For five years Kobi has relied on twenty-seven magic words on colorful Post-it notes to help her cope with her parents' disappearance. With so many confusing changes in her life, their magic may not be enough.

27 Magic Words is the best novel I've read in a long time. I highly recommend it to children and adults alike.

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### **Donna Dobihal Smith says**

Characters seem older sometimes than the age they are, which sometimes stretched credulity for me. Also, things got tied up a little too quickly and neatly for me. These were minor flaws in an otherwise absorbing story with memorable characters.

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## **Carla Dominguez says**

So sweet and sad

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## **Janet Hutchinson says**

A lovely little story about loss, change and learning to accept both. And to come to terms with the greatest loss of all.

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## **Barbara says**

Ten-year-old Kobi Alighieri has 27 magic words given to her by her mother, a writer, and she uses them to comfort herself. She has become convinced that certain words will have specific results, and that she can see her parents when she says, "Avanti!" When she and her older sister Brook move from their grandmother's Paris home to Des Moines to live with their uncle, Wim, the words help Kobi cope. But she finds American schools confusing, and tells lies about her parents and her neighbors to her classmates in order to impress them and ends up betraying Norman, a classmate who has befriended her when the others made fun of her. Meanwhile, Brook has her own methods of coping with her sorrows and the anxieties caused by a move to a new place. Readers hearts will break as they realize what the truth about the Alighieris and marvel at the coping mechanisms humans use to get them through tragic life events. Clearly, these girls are loved and cherished, even though it might not be by the ones they wish were still by their sides. There are wonderfully subtle hints about the histories that are shared among humans, especially in the case of Grandmamma and Ms. Hancock.

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## **Melissa Menten says**

In the same vein as Counting by 7's or The Thing About Jellyfish, this is a beautifully written story about Kobi, whose father was an amateur magician and whose mother was an author. Before her parents disappeared on a sailing trip, her mother gave her post-it notes with "magic" words, which she uses to cope with all the bad things that happen after the tragedy of losing her parents. What is so well-done is getting inside Kobi's head, how she really doesn't accept what happened to the point where the reader roots for her "magic" to work. And all of the characters were so well fleshed out. Just loved it!

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## **Lisa says**

You will love the MC in this book, as she faces the inevitable changes and losses life brings her. And I'm thinking we could all use a few magic words in our lives. Beautifully written and plotted with a timeless message about love and family.

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## **Tasha says**

Kobi knows that her parents are still alive. When they sailed off on a two month adventure five years ago and didn't return, Kobi was still able to see them when she used the magic word "Avanti!" It is one of 27 words that her writer mother gave her when she was little and told her were magical. Kobi and her older sister lived with their grandmother in Paris but now are heading to Des Moines, Iowa to go to school for a few months and live with their Uncle Wim. As Kobi tries to adapt to her new environment, she finds herself telling lies defensively as her classmates ask her questions. As the lies begin to catch up with Kobi, she is forced to realize that she has been lying to herself as well.

Moranville has written a book that is a blissful read. She uses small moments to speak to larger issues, captures details that bring the world she has created fully alive. There is Norman who wears clothes to blend in and not be noticed. There is Kobi's older sister who is struggling with OCD. The entire family fills the pages with art, gardens, food and color. It is a beautifully built world.

The writing throughout the novel is exceptional. There are paragraphs that are completely exquisite. This one appears on page 108 and is about a woman struggling with Alzheimer's:

Ms. Hancock was like a beautiful picture that had been rained on, then driven over by a car, then left under a pile of leaves to be nibbled by squirrels, and the only beautiful bit left was a tiny patch of incredible blue in one corner.

A strong novel that blends grief, lies, loss and the potential for real magic. Appropriate for ages 9-12.

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## **Elyse Marie says**

This is a moving story for middle graders about dealing with change and coming to terms with reality. This book shows the journey to acceptance of the truth can be complex and messy, not only for the main character, Kobi, but for her whole family who just want her well being. The stories that become sort of secondary plot lines of Grandmamma, the Hancocks, and Uncle Wim deal with the same topic as everyone has things they must come to terms with as their lives change. This book shows beautifully the theme that bad things might happen in life but the way they are handled makes all the difference in how they affect someone. The way the author handles grief, anxiety, and both mental and physical health in such an appropriate way for young readers is touching, but honestly this is not just a book for children. I read this book in all of about 4 hours and it made me cry towards the end.

Making connections between the 27 magic words themselves (some of which I had to look up as an adult with an English degree) to the "magic" Kobi thinks they produce is a good exercise in vocabulary building. Between that and the author's occasional use of less common sentence structure (eg "we're not to do that" vs. "we're not SUPPOSED to do that") young readers will be challenged to think critically about their understanding of the book.

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