



The Easy Way Out

Steven Amsterdam

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If you could help someone in pain, would you?

Evan is a nurse, a suicide assistant. His job is legal . . . just. He's the one at the hospital who hands out the last drink to those who ask for it.

Evan's friends don't know what he does during the day. His mother, Viv, doesn't know what he's up to at night. And his supervisor suspects there may be trouble ahead.

As he helps one patient after another die, Evan pushes against legality, his own morality and the best intentions of those closest to him, discovering that his own path will be neither quick nor painless.

He knows what he has to do.

In this powerful novel, award-winning author Steven Amsterdam challenges readers to face the most taboo and heartbreaking of dilemmas. Would you help someone end their life?

The Easy Way Out Details

Date : Published August 30th 2016 by Hachette Australia

ISBN :

Author : Steven Amsterdam

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Australia

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From Reader Review The Easy Way Out for online ebook

Lisa says

There are, as I write, renewed efforts to introduce legislation in Victoria that would allow assisted suicide, but I don't suppose that Steven Amsterdam or his publishers knew when they signed their contracts just how topical this book was going to be. *The Easy Way Out* is a confronting exploration of what assisted suicide might mean for anyone involved. The title is ironic: in the world created by Amsterdam, even though assisted suicide is legal, there is no easy way out...

Narrated with a kind of sardonic intimacy as if Amsterdam is not going to indulge any sentimental views about death, the novel traces a trajectory as Evan, a nurse who has chosen work as a suicide assistant, tests the boundaries of the law. Working in the confines of the Mercy hospital where every 'assist' is monitored and documented and scrutinised afterwards, Evan finds it hard to stay as detached as he is supposed to. Families don't always follow the script, and the 'simple' act of drinking a cup of Nembutal isn't always so simple for someone with muscles that don't obey any more. And it's not just that procedures don't allow for human frailty, there's also the psychological impact on Evan to consider. He doesn't tell people what he does because not everyone shares his view that he is helping people to die a good death. Crucially, he doesn't tell his lovers Lon and Simon.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2016/09/28/t...>

Neil says

I received a free copy via Netgalley in exchange for a honest review.

This was a really difficult book to read and the subject I felt was over simplified.
I could not connect with the characters.
Not for me.

Craig Allen says

Evan is a young nurse that works in the department that helps terminal patients end their lives (it's been legalized in this story) but of course, there's lots of other stuff going on, too. His father committed suicide when he was a child. His wacky mother, dealing with her own illness, is in and out of a nursing facility. His love life is...complicated. His job is controversial, and he keeps it secret from many in his life. I thought this was a pretty good book and found the topic of assisted suicide particularly interesting. I really enjoyed Evan and would like to see some sort of sequel to this book if the author feels there's more of his adventures to tell, which I think there is.

Yzabel Ginsberg says

[I received a copy of this novel through NetGalley.]

OK, I admit I don't really know what to write in this review, which seldom happens. It wasn't a bad story—and its theme is fairly interesting (legalised euthanasia, and potential risks and abuse that may be related to it vs. what it accomplishes for people who suffer). But I never really feel connected to the characters, and thus never really cared about them.

I can feel somewhat close to the debate about euthanasia. I'm not sure if it's something I'd choose for myself, however with my phobia of cancer, I really "get" the wish to go while you can still decide for yourself, because I see absolutely no point in "living longer" if this "life" is spent pissing myself in a hospital bed and begging for morphine or not being aware anymore of what's around me. At this point, that's not even surviving anymore, so... I don't know. Somehow I really hope I'll never have to find out for myself. That's the kind of knowledge I can blissfully remain ignorant of.

Evan's dilemmas, his trouble adjusting to what his job demanded of him and what, deep inside, he wanted/needed to give, were interesting as well. There are a lot of grey areas here, and I'd often wonder at all the legal parts in this legalised assisted death in the novel: on the one hand, the law has to prevent abuse, otherwise it's easy to veer into murder; on the other, what do you do when a patient with degenerative disease has expressed until the end their wish to die, but their disease prevent them from drinking their glass of Nembutal? Not helping means denying their wishes; but actually helping them drink may be construed as "pushy" and "choosing for them". So, so very grey.

Also, props for including a relationship that is not the cookie-cutter traditional heterosexual one, AND including it in a natural way, as something that simply "is", and not some matter for moral discussion or judgment or whatever. You don't see that too often to my liking in books and movies. Granted, I wished Evan had been more involved in it, because Lon and Simon were lovely and supportive people, and I felt they were always left on the sideline; but that has nothing to do with gender.

On the other hand, some things were not fleshed out enough. Evan's relationship with his boss Nettie, for starters—I was sure there was matter for discussion here, a basis for more conflict and/or, on the contrary, more relating, yet it was never really accomplished. Same with Evan's decision to keep mum about his job when it came to some of (close) characters, or Jasper's Path, which came a bit out of nowhere?

I didn't really get either the very, very quick decline in Viv. Sure, it was dramatic, however the scientist in me would've liked to see more explanations about her going from Parkinson's to almost-miraculous recovery to going downhill in a matter of 4-5 days. I totally get the whole tragedy in her condition—a fiercely independent woman who finds herself becoming dependent and is inwardly scared of it—but this decline felt like a plot device and not like an exactly natural evolution of said plot, if that makes sense.

Conclusion: interesting, but I never felt involved.

Giselle A Nguyen says

3.5 stars

Had been looking forward to this one for ages and while it didn't quite live up to my expectations, it was beautifully written and I found myself caring deeply for the characters. It was also nice to see the

representation of a non-normative relationship. Amsterdam explores the complexities of euthanasia with skill and sensitivity, and his experience as a professional nurse shines through – the attention to detail is tremendous. The ending was a bit of an anticlimax, but overall I enjoyed this book and it raised many ethical questions for me, leaving me with plenty to ponder.

Leah says

The Easy Way Out was promised to me to be uplifting, funny, thoughtful, and it very much was all of those things. It probably wouldn't have been a novel I would have picked up myself, but after an email from the publicist for the book, the book was firmly on my radar. It sounded right up my street, and I don't mean that in a weird way, but honestly? Euthanasia interests me – why someone would choose to go that way, whether that's braver than suffering for no real reason, it's just a really interesting topic.

Evan's story is so sad, but so interesting. There's part of me that wants to wrap this damaged man-child up in a blanket and tell him everything would be okay. He just seemed kind of down all the time, which is extra worrying, considering what he can lay his hands on, am I right? But I also liked the part of him that was, in his own weird way, helping people to stop suffering. Because that's quite an amazing thing, it's just hard to read, because no one wants to think of anyone in that kind of situation, but the way these guys deal with the patients they see, day in, day out is pretty impressive.

One of the most impressive plot points of the novel is Evan's relationship with his mother, Viv. Viv is so bright, so sparky, so full of life, that to see her cruelly took down by Parkinsons was so, so hard to swallow. And her relationship with Evan is complicated, but there's so much love there, as proven come the end of this compelling, interesting read.

The Easy Way Out is one of those books that will stay with me for life, true story. It's kind of hard to forget this kind of plot, and all the occurs within the pages of this book, and Evan's life is like a tragic comedy, where you want to look away, cover your eyes and keep looking like watching a car crash. I can see this novel soaring when it releases, this was such a compelling book, I really enjoyed it (which is a weird thing to say considering the plot, but hey ho, I did enjoy it, and it certainly kept me reading).

Rebecca Jane Brown says

Before writing a commentary on this book, I took to fellow Goodread reviewers to see how others responded to this book. Due to its subject matter, the reviews are heavily influenced by the readers stance on euthanasia. I do not intend that to cloud my judgement of this book.

I picked this up knowing nothing about it. It was on a recommended shelf at the library, had a striking cover (with gorgeous font) and from the vague two word reviews on the front - I thought I'd have a bash at it. There was no blurb.

I think it's brave to tackle this subject matter, I've not read another that depicts the death of others quite like this.

Unfortunately, whilst the writing itself was beautifully written, the story lacked any sort of motion and came

to several halts.

The opening got me but it quickly slipped away and I found myself skimming lines out of boredom. I was shocked how bored I became! I didn't think I'd finish at all.

The cover described it as 'blackly funny', there was nothing funny about this book (not just referring to its primary subject, of course). I didn't enjoy reading this.

If you're someone who enjoys big questions in life such as those surrounding euthanasia, then this might be one for you. Overall though, I wouldn't recommend.

Angelique Simonsen says

may be its my age but i cannot connect with this book. have tried 3 times now to read it but it is just so strange to imagine this....maybe i just am against euthanasia deep down although id like to choose the way i go i cannot see how this scenario would not be abused and how it would work. gave me the feeling of a huge conveyor belt where although it seems that the person has choice they dont really.

PattyMacDotComma says

4.5★

Easy for some, maybe, but not so easy for others. Pulling the pin, opting out, offing oneself with Nembutal is dicey enough that you might want someone there to make sure you wake up dead. That's all very well for you, but, who would you lumber with that?

Steven Amsterdam is not only a good writer, he's a Melbourne palliative care nurse, which gives Evan's voice an authenticity others might not manage.

This is not a pro-euthanasia treatise. It's Evan's story of growing up with a gypsy mother, Vivian, whose habit was funded by the life insurance payout after his father died when his car "accidentally" ran off the road. She's the kind of casual mum who takes off for a weekend, unannounced, leaving only a note, so Evan will learn to fend for himself.

He's a nurse and works here and there and has a few relationships here and there, but now Vivian has an odd form of Parkinson's, which they've been managing until they aren't. She doesn't quite take off for Willow Wood (nursing home) leaving only a note, but almost. (And she makes a run for freedom again later, but that's another whole colourful whole story.)

Right after "Measure 961" passes, legalising assisted dying, Vivian spots an ad for Mercy Hospital seeking a nurse for a 'pilot program'.

"My mother said, 'This is the real deal. You've spent enough time with the sickness end of the business. Death is where life gets really interesting.' "

He ticks the box for no known suicides in the family, and is accepted. Mercy screens potential 961

candidates at length , filming and documenting everything, I mean every thing, and Evan has a look at some of his first customer's conversations.

“He was clear at the start.

‘I’m done. Totally done.’

The guidelines for Measure 961 don’t let anyone out that easily.

‘What does the idea of dying mean to you? How do you imagine your death? How do you feel when you think of the people in your world going about their lives with you?’

The correct answer is ‘shitty’ naturally, but once you’ve spent a month in a hospital, you develop a sense for the responses that will get you what you want. Teddy found half a dozen different ways to say ‘Let me out.’ Even then, the questions are reframed and circular, examining death from infinite angles until, by the third hour of viewing, you could believe that the suffering Teddy wanted to end was the evaluation itself.”

Yep. No wonder people get frustrated. They just want to go to sleep . . . and stay there.

Hospital deathbed scenes are meticulously recorded, reports are written and reviewed, assistants are evaluated. The administrative nightmare is such that it would be a brave assistant indeed who tried to speed somebody through the process.

Meanwhile, Evan’s private life is spent between his mum’s place and sleeping between gay couple Lon and Simon with whom he’s having a spicy 3-way affair. The sex is explicit, very, including the acrobatics, and as Evan is the one telling the story, necessary. It’s easy to skip if you want to, but for Evan, it’s the one thing that gets him outside of his own head, his weird life with his mother and his weird job.

He says it’s a nice relationship because if he wants to be alone, the other two have each other for company. I think it’s part of what he missed as the child in a 3-person family that went camping together, but perhaps I’m reading too much into it.

Evan finds he’s sometimes the last confidante of a patient who thinks they don’t want to confide in anyone . . . until suddenly they have a last-minute urge to unload some thoughts. Evan is supposed to be only a bystander. One man gets quite philosophical about the successful life he’s had and the people he’s lost along the way while he’s escaped unscathed . . . so far, saying:

“Here’s the truth: it’s a shooting gallery, and you’re lucky every day until you’re not.”

A private organisation provides services to people at home who just want someone experienced to make sure they wake up dead, and he tries that for a while, with some horrific consequences.

Amsterdam touches on legal and inheritance issues of the patients who want to opt out, but this really is about Evan and Vivian and how some people decide to stay or go.

Quotations are from my NetGalley preview copy, so they may have changed in the final publication.

Sonia says

Evan is a nurse, and he knows that he's a good one – he really does care! However, in his new role, he isn't saving lives – he's helping to end them.

Assisted suicide is a huge moral, ethical and emotive subject, and not one that you would think could be the basis for an enjoyable, entertaining, often funny novel – but Steven Amsterdam manages it.

Evan is young, gay and single and has moved back into his mum's place as her own health has been rapidly deteriorating. This involved finding a new job, hence becoming an 'assistant' to those that have chosen to legally end their lives.

With Evan narrating, the book covers legal and moral issues of assisted suicide, seeing it from both sides, but also gives an insight into the effects on relationships, and the different ways that people choose to die.

Understandably, once he has made a number of 'assists' and as he comes to terms with his own mother's slow demise, Evan finds himself questioning his own beliefs taking us on a roller-coaster of emotions that he deals with in varying degrees.

Steven Amsterdam has managed to pen a story that is touching, funny, informative, raunchy (in one scene), heart-wrenching and definitely makes you question your own views around the subject.

Irene Brew says

WARNING - THIS POST CONTAINS SWEARING!

I'm going to be completely honest (as always) and tell you that I was in two minds whether to request this book for review after reading the blurb; it sounded intriguing and something different from the norm, but also a bit of a touchy subject. Touchy seems such an inadequate word there, though I'm not sure that 'delicate' which is the only other one springing to mind, is even better. See I guess, that part of my problem, and I'm sure for many others, is that death is such a, well, "touchy" subject. Anyway, where I'm going with this is I'm very pleased I did actually take the plunge and I'm grateful (thank you to Quercus and Netgalley for the copy!) I have had the chance to review it.

Not that it was an immediately smooth ride, the beginning had me smiling, but then by the dénouement of the first assisted suicide, the tears were well and truly flowing. Not even polite tears running down the face, no I'm talking full-on proper crying. I'll admit that I did then have a little internal battle with myself as to whether I could actually do this, and by 'this' I mean continue reading the book rather than any struggle with what was happening. But I steeled myself and journeyed on.

I have absolutely no moral dilemma with what was happening at Mercy Hospital, the lives and decisions are clearly the patients' own, they, on the whole, had the support of those around them, so who am I to stand by and judge? Who know what we would do until we're in that situation. We can hypothesise and imagine, but, well you know, "Never judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins".

If you haven't been unfortunate (now that IS a totally inadequate word) enough to lose someone close, and dare I say it, see the fucking disease that is cancer, as Amsterdam puts it go "through him like drain cleaner", then you are, very, very blessed. This truly horrendous disease seems to be everywhere. I honestly don't think I know anyone who hasn't be affected by it somewhere in their lives, be it friends or family. And I

think this was my initial struggle with the book, and I hope I'm not spoiling it here, but the first scene is of a man, Teddy, who has been ravaged by cancer. Maybe if it had been another disease I could have acclimatised myself to it first - though even as I'm writing this I know that is pretty much baloney. I guess at least this way I was facing my demons pretty much head-on. And I shan't go into it here, not because I'm ashamed or embarrassed in any way sharing it, or because I would not be able to see the page amidst my tears, but because it is private, in that repressed English way. I shall say that I (forgive me) fucking hate cancer with every ounce of my being, and every day, every single day I miss my Dad. Anyway, (wiping eyes furiously) this isn't just a book about cancer, no there are lots more horrendous diseases to familiarise yourself with!

And, actually, whilst I'm still thinking about it, I don't know if *The Easy Way Out*, is the right title. I can see the way in which it's meant but I think it takes fecking courage to opt for this ending. Yes being able to choose the time and manner of your death empowers you, yes you get a pain-free exit, but oh the courage, or the desperation it must take.

Anyway, now, however many words in we are, I realise that I've told you practically nothing about the book and what is probably more than acceptable (or wanted) of the workings of my erratic brain. Aside of, or perhaps because of, the rollercoaster of emotions experienced, I did enjoy this book. Evan, as the protagonist, is a likeable character, caring for his mother Viv, trying to find a way to help patients in one way or another, and seemingly shying away from lovers/friends, Lon and Simon. I couldn't help but think that perhaps he might have benefitted from a little dose of therapy or something that would have helped his apparent inability to be loved. Anyway there I go again, I apologise.

Is it a book about trying to get the most out of life? A book about love and what it is to be loved? It's probably both those things and more. Yes at times it's very sad (though perhaps worth noting here that my eyes are I think hot-wired to leak at every opportunity), but it is also funny, and a little bit raunchy at times. It certainly gives you lots to talk and think about, in case you hadn't guess that already!

Please, read this, I think armed with tissues you'll get a lot more out of it, than just the great read it is.

Louise Wilson says

Evan is a nurse but not one that helps to save lives, his role is to help end lives. He is part of a pilot project which he has to be at the bedside of terminally ill patients, making sure they fully understand what they are doing and handing them their last drink which contains the drug that will end their life.

Evan's personal life has been quite complicated. His father committed suicide when Evan was just a small boy. His mother has just been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. As a gay man his life is complicated as well as it involves a tangled relationship with a male couple. Be warned the sex scenes are a bit graphic.

This is a hard subject for anyone to discuss but must have been more difficult to write about. It is a heart-wrenching, touching, informative and sometimes funny roller coaster ride which is very well written.

I would like to thank NetGalley, Quercus Books and the author Steven Amsterdam for my ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Deborah says

I suspect some may find the subject matter of *The Easy Way Out* by Steven Amsterdam slightly confronting.

After all, we still don't talk a lot about euthanasia and assisted suicide. Although perhaps we should.

We meet Evan on the day of his first 'assist'. He's been working on the program since Measure 961 was introduced - though his previous role primarily involved the psychiatric assessment of potential clients and logistical arrangements. It seems a natural progression then that he move into a newly vacant position of an assistant... liaising with the patient and their loved ones, and... ultimately passing the patient a cup of Nembutal when the time comes.

The plot of this novel unfolds slowly. We meet a number of Evan's clients and follow his mother, Viv's progression as she undergoes treatment. But this book is very much about Evan's journey. He supports the notion of euthanasia and is consciously cautious of protocols around the new legislation, but he's got a kind and fragile heart and soon finds himself crossing some boundaries he didn't expect to be problems.

Assisted suicide or euthanasia is a sensitive topic and one Amsterdam handles with compassion, respect and with humour. I enjoyed this engaging outing from Amsterdam - my first with the palliative care nurse, who most certainly knows his stuff.

Read the full review on my website: <http://www.debbish.com/books-literatu...>

3.5 stars

Carol - Reading Writing and Riesling says

My View:

This book is very easy to read, the main characters are well developed and interesting, contemporary themes are explored in depth, many perspectives are shared; this book has a lot to offer.

Relationships are put under the microscope, moral dilemmas abound. I applaud this author as he deftly introduces the subjects of assisted suicides, voluntary euthanasia, depression, terminal illness and suicide by "accident" into this narrative. Steven Amsterdam has cleverly created a safe place for lively discussion within this work of contemporary fiction and his experience as a palliative care nurse gives this book a unique tone and honesty as it subtly asks the question, "Would you help someone end their life?"

An interesting contemporary read that will cause reflection and debate.

Teresa says

One of the most emotive subjects an author can take on must surely be that of 'the right to die' or 'assisted suicide'. It is a subject that can cause strong feelings and emotions whichever side you may fall in the debate, and indeed has been a cause of many a family argument. So Steven Amsterdam must have been feeling pretty brave the day he sat down to write his new novel *The Easy Way Out*, about a gay male nurse, Evan, who finds himself working as a dying assistant in a hospital as part of a pilot project. His job entails being present at the suicide of terminally ill patients, making it clear that they understand what they are doing, and handing them their last drink containing a suicide drug. Standing by to ensure all goes smoothly, and answering the questions of family members who may be present during their loved ones last moments.

Evan has a complicated work life. But he also has a complicated personal life. His mother has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and the prognosis is not good. Evan's father committed suicide when he was a small boy, which may explain his fascination with death and assisted suicide. And his sex life is also complex involving a tangled relationship with a male couple. But things are about to get even more complicated when his mother Viv goes missing.

I found this book difficult to read, and to be honest I couldn't wait to finish it. I found the subject of assisted suicide heavy going, and somewhat disturbing. A light read this isn't. However, Steven Amsterdam handles this controversial topic sensitively, and the main character Evan comes across as a likeable guy, his mother Viv is more complex and I found her more difficult to figure out. There are some quite detailed sex scenes between Evan and this male couple that I could have done without reading in such detail, and I found it hard to get my head around a nurse who assists in the deliberate ending of life instead of trying to do everything possible to preserve life. However, I did find myself warming more towards Evan in the final chapters of the book.

I went into this book with a particular opinion on assisted suicide and this book did nothing to change my opinion. As a book group read this book will make for many a heated discussion around the table i'm sure.

Thanks to Nudge/NewBooks, NetGalley, Quercus Books, and the author Steven Amsterdam for my free e-arc in return for an honest review.
