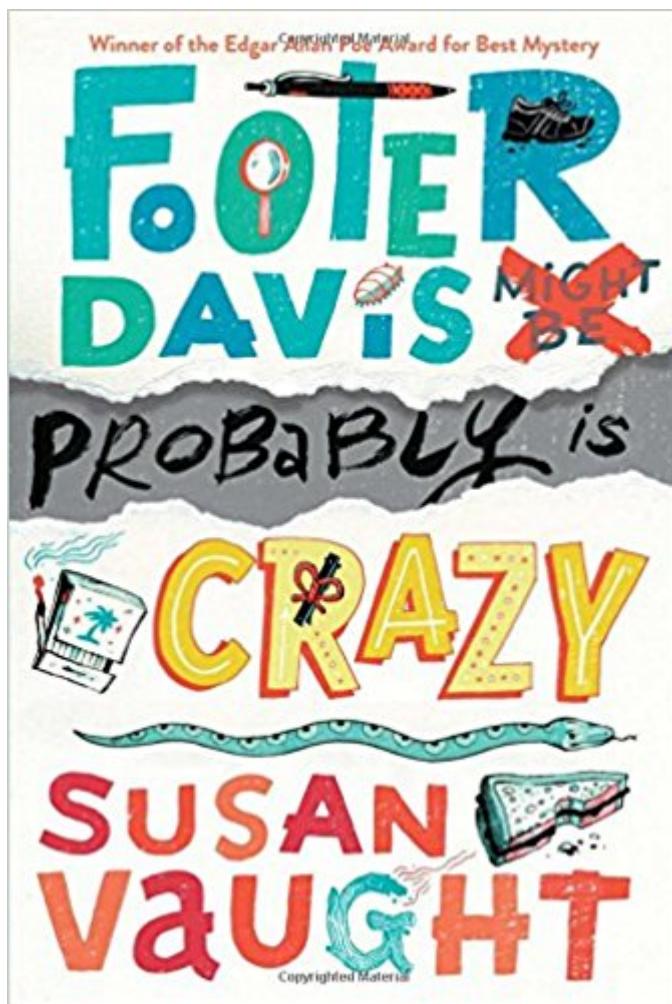


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# Footer Davis Probably Is Crazy



## Synopsis

Winner of the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best mystery. Footer Davis is on the case when two kids go missing after a fire in this humorous and honest novel that is full of Southern style. Here are some things that are true about Footer Davis: 1. She has a BB gun named Louise. 2. Walruses freak her out. 3. Her mom has bipolar disorder. But she wants you to know that it's not that big a deal. She's just Mom, and usually she's fine except sometimes when she doesn't take her pills. But right now what's most important to Footer is what happened to those kids at the Abrams farm. See, there was a fire there a few nights ago, and those kids haven't been seen since. Pretty sure they got burned up. What Footer and Peavine—that's her best friend—want to know is who started the fire? This middle grade mystery is funny, honest, populated with interesting characters, and Southern to the core. Kirkus Reviews called it "a sensitive, suspenseful mystery that deftly navigates the uncertainty of mental illness."•

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 5-7•  
An average 10-year-old would likely pick up this book expecting a "Wimpy Kid" epigone—especially with the playful cover art. What Vaught has given readers instead is a highly didactic, heavy-handed approach to the topics of mental illness, genetics, Common Core, and gun control. This failure is compounded by the format: protagonist Footer's story is told through a combination of journal entries and school essays. Footer's mother, who is bipolar and through the

course of the novel confined to a mental hospital, is one of several suspects in the murder of an elderly neighbor and the likely murder of his two grandchildren. Footer is not sure if she witnessed these events or has hallucinated them. At one point, social workers force Footer's dad to get rid of the guns in their house. Dad is less than pleased, believing that "guns don't kill people, people kill people." What mystery there is does not remain so for long. VERDICT Vaught's book lacks a realistic voice, adequate pacing, and sufficient drama. —Nina Sachs, Walker Memorial Library, Westbrook, ME --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"I was so far from normal, it wasn't even funny" —except, of course, when it was," remarks Footer Davis, establishing the tone for an investigation into missing kids and parental mental illness. For Footer, normality includes her mother going off her medication and pulverizing snakes with an elephant gun, leading to hospitalization for her bipolar disorder. Coinciding with her mother's latest episode is the case of two children who disappeared in a fire after a murder, which Footer and her friends are determined to solve, their record of the investigation playing out via interviews and banter in their notebooks. The notebook entries provide levity, light romance and strong touches of character development in an increasingly tense plot. Suddenly, Footer is seeing a girl in flames and hearing her mother's voice. What if Footer is inheriting her mother's illness? Worse, what if her mother was involved in the murder? When everything seems like a symptom on the Internet, the line between "normal" and "crazy" blurs, and Vaught traces it with realistic care. As Footer tries to make sense of her mother's disjointed conversations, the line touches her mother, too —readers will be moved and reassured to discover that even in her illness, her mother is still a mother, watching out for Footer in her own ways. A sensitive, suspenseful mystery that deftly navigates the uncertainty of mental illness. (Kirkus Reviews January 1, 2015)As fifth-grader Footer Davis and her best friend, Peavine Jones, investigate the shooting of an elderly farmer and the disappearance of his grandchildren, Footer begins to wonder whether she is going crazy like her mother and, worse, if her bipolar mother is a murderer. This suspenseful story, set in a small Mississippi town, explores themes of domestic violence and mental illness in a way that highlights the support of caring parents, neighbors, and other adults. In the course of the second week after the fire that destroyed the Abrams' house and, perhaps, killed the children, Footer begins to experience what she first thinks are hallucinations and later decides are flashbacks to the night of the tragedy. Her first-person narrative is interrupted by entries from Peavine's investigative notebooks, Footer's school essays, and her changing theories. This tightly woven mystery also includes a tender friendship evolving into something more. That Peavine navigates on crutches is

so matter-of-factly treated, readers may not even notice. For middle-graders, this is a sympathetic exploration of some difficult issues. (Booklist February 15, 2015)Eleven-year-old Footer Davis' mother, Adele, is notorious in their small Mississippi hometown—she's a pretty thing, the neighbors say, but she ain't right, bless her heart. After shooting off an elephant rifle in their backyard, Adele, who has bipolar disorder, is admitted to a psychiatric hospital, leaving Footer temporarily motherless. To distract herself from her mother's worsening condition, budding journalist Footer investigates a dramatic unsolved local crime—someone shot Mr. Abrams, burned down his farm, and possibly kidnapped his grandchildren. With help from her best friend Peavine, an aspiring detective with cerebral palsy, Footer interviews neighbors, takes crime-scene photographs, and researches the habits of serial killers. Her 911-dispatcher father humors her at first, but her efforts lead to serious consequences, including false accusations and disturbing visions that lead Footer to question her own mental stability. Footer's lively narrative voice and irreverent sense of humor add levity to the heavy subject matter. The troubling mental symptoms that worry Footer are eventually revealed to be clues pointing toward the fate of the missing children—a clever conclusion, but perhaps too tidy for a story that so deftly illuminates the painful, complex uncertainties of life with a mentally ill parent. Like its heroine, this contemporary mystery is compelling, offbeat, and fearless. (Horn Book March/April 2015)Nine days after a neighbor is shot on his farm and the man's two grandchildren disappear, 11-year-old Fontana Footer Davis, her best friend Peavine, and his younger sister set out to find out what happened. Their investigation takes them to the farm, which burned down that same night, and their interviews with townsfolk appear throughout, along with Footer's amusing school assignments (Reinhardt provides doodles on Footer's behalf). Complicating the investigation are Footer's visions of the fire. Is it possible that she was there that night and has repressed the memory? Or is Footer following in the footsteps of her mother, who just been taken to a psychiatric ward? Vaught (Insanity) deftly portrays the pain of having a mentally ill parent, capturing Footer's simultaneous love for and resentment of her mother, as well as her fears for her own sanity. The unusual and entertaining residents of Footer's small Mississippi town bring moments of humor to a well-plotted mystery that effectively explores some serious themes. (Publishers Weekly)Twelve-year-old Footer Davis wants to be a journalist, and her best friend, Peavine, wants to be a detective, so the two set out to solve the mystery of their neighbor's murder and the fire that may have killed his two grandchildren. Footer's distracted from her investigations, though, when her mother is

hospitalized for bipolar disorder. Now Footer has to deal with a nosy social worker, a teacher she hates, and some pesky hallucinations that might be traumatic memories of abuse she actually witnessed or might be, she fears, indications that she too will suffer from the same mental illness as her mom. Footer's tongue is as sharp as her mind, and she has no problem sticking up for herself, even when the odds are against her. Vaught keeps up the energy of the reading experience by mixing in various other elements, including Footer's illustrated school reports and lists, witness interviews transcribed by Peavine, and journal entries written by Peavine's precocious little sister. A busy cast of likable small-town southern folk brings authentic variety to the mix; Peavine has cerebral palsy, for instance, and Captain Armstrong, a neighbor, suffers from PTSD, but like Footer's mom's bipolar disorder, these are just things you cope with as you go about your business. Footer ends her journalism career with a solved crime and a new understanding of the mentally ill, social workers, and herself; readers who appreciate a mystery with heart, humor, and a little trauma will enjoy this. An interview with the author and suggestions for further reading, fiction and non, on brain disorders follows the text. (Bulletin June 2015) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Oh, Footer. I love you. This book is so phenomenal, I can't believe I've never heard of it. Footer Davis is a spunky, curious, heavy-hearted, brave, romantic soul who captured my heart from the very first page, "The day my mother exploded a copperhead snake with an elephant gun, I decided I was genetically destined to become a felon or a big-game hunter. That was good, since I had tried being a ballerina, poet, artist, and musician, and I ducked at all of those." There's been a tragedy in Footer's home town. A fire. A murder. And some children have disappeared. She's trying to solve the mystery, but there's a fear that her mentally ill mother could be involved. I was intrigued by the mystery and Vaught actually did surprise me with its conclusion, but the heart of this novel is Footer's journey to find and accept herself. A series of odd occurrences make her start to question her own sanity and this tears at her relationship with her father, her adorable, older neighbor and former cop, and her best friend/crush. This book is impactful and sweet and powerful and oh so real, because life is messy AND scary sometimes.

Susan Vaught has done it again. With an adorable, endearing protagonist, and a heartfelt, quirky, and comical cast of characters, this novel, exploring bi-polar disorder and a murder/arsenal mystery, was captivating from page 1. The romance was cute, and the inner dialogue flawless. Susan, please don't write any more horror, and keep bringing us stuff like Footer Davis - your realistic,

physcological, issue-driven fiction. I will be a fan for life.

Yes, it's written for middle grade readers, but adults will enjoy this story, which echoes the vibe of "To Kill a Mockingbird." Imagine Scout, Jem, and Dill brought into the 21st century but still in a small rural town with modern problems. Whether your age is 12 or a multiple of 12, you'll enjoy this story.

This book was amazing! I'm in the reading bowl at my school and thought I'd check this out. I'm so glad I did! Any sensible (and insensible) person would love this book!

Strange story.

Another great novel by Susan Vaught. Many people will be able to relate to the relationship between Footer and her Mother. This is a Southern style story that is very well written. 5 Stars!!!

FOOTER DAVIS is a gem of a mystery written for kids written in a clear Southern voice. Susan Vaught deftly tackles heavier issues such as abuse, gun control, and mental illness with a sensitive and knowledgeable hand -- and all from the point of view of eleven-year-old Fontana (but call her Footer), who fears she may be growing sick like her mother. Footer's best friend Peavine may be my favorite; he provides support, humor (especially in his investigative journaling), and a touch of sweetness. He also has CP, but not once does Vaught use his disability as a plot device. Peavine's need for poles for balance are just part of who he is . . . I thoroughly enjoyed FOOTER DAVIS and am left to ponder whether I am a flower or a rock.

So much to love about this book, and disability enlightenment and acceptance are chief. My mother suffered mental illness hospitalizations when I was a child, so I completely relate. PTSD from a child's point of view and a veteran's. I love Footer and her friends. Written for middle grades, I would have taught this book if I were not retired. Thoroughly enjoyable for adults.

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