

JILL BIALOSKY

AUTHOR OF HOUSE UNDER SNOW

THE LIFE ROOM



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Eleanor Cahn is a professor of literature, the wife of a preeminent cardiac surgeon, and a devoted mother. But on a trip to Paris to present a paper on Anna Karenina, Eleanor re-connects with Stephen—a childhood friend with whom she has had a complicated relationship—that forces her to realize that she has suppressed her passionate self for years. As the novel unfolds, we learn of her hidden erotic past: with alluring, elusive Stephen; with ethereal William, her high school boyfriend; with married, egotistical Adam, the painter who initiated her into the intimacies of the "life room," where the artist's model sometimes becomes muse; and with loyal, steady Michael, her husband. On her return to New York, Eleanor and Stephen's charged attraction takes on a life of its own and threatens to destroy everything she has.

Jill Bialosky has created a fresh, piercingly real heroine who struggles with the spiritual questions and dilemmas of our time and, like Tolstoy's immortal Anna Karenina, must choose between desire and responsibility.

The Life Room Details

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From Reader Review The Life Room for online ebook

Diana says

I think the reason that this book gets five stars from me is the simple fact that Jill Bialosky created a female character that is complicated yet real. I have not read Anna Karenina, and I don't plan on reading it. However, I could see the ties from Eleanor's life and Anna's, and while I will admit it was cheesy at times, it was also beautiful. Eleanor, like most women who are infatuated with the arts, is not content with the conventional way of life. She wants the thrills of romanticism and yet, the only men who can give her that are troubled ex boyfriends who never truly loved or appreciated her. Her husband is a good guy and she has two great kids but she loses sight of them because of the thrill of chasing her past and looking for signs in the fuck-ups she used to love. I related to her because I have had moments where I thought, now why doesn't my husband "get me" like this person gets me? Why doesn't he love literature the way I love literature... But are these things to ruin a marriage over? Anyway, this is a tedious read but I enjoyed it.

Leisa says

I liked things about this book, the way she weaving the literature themes into the life of her character. It is mostly a book about one women's internal life. However, I could never identify with the motivation of the main character. Overall, not quite satisfying - it just seemed a "near miss" to be really good.

Nancy says

I only made it about 1/3 of the way through and just couldn't finish it...wasn't horrible but wasn't good enough to continue reading, either.

Amy says

disappointingly self-indulgent and annoying.

Realmforgoth says

This book conjured memories I thought I've buried deep. Reading it made me feel like I can't get up in the morning. Bialosky's good at making things so real, yet unreal. It's dark - I felt morose, hopeless. Every line rarely means nothing. It's so good I don't want to finish it. I digested line by line, and if I miss anything I would go through it once again. Oh one thing that I don't agree is the ending - too simple.

T.J. Silverio says

My reaction to this story is mixed. Jill Bialosky attempted to capture the story of conflicted passion and loss in Tolstoy's Anna Karenina but it becomes in my view too obvious and ultimately unsuccessful. Interestingly about a third of the way through the story, in section II, she switches the POV from third person past tense to first person present tense. As a writer myself, at first I found this unsettling, it knocked me out of the story and I had to go back and make sure what I had been reading was in fact past tense third person. Turns out this section was entries in a diary but there was no introduction of that change. However, this section for me was the best of the book. The references to art and literature were insightful and the character came alive. I wonder why the author did not write the entire book in that POV?

The ending was frustrating because Eleanor did not make a decision. While it seemed she intended to explore more deeply the strange bond she had with Stephen, he turns away and she returns to her previous life, there is no resolution of the conflicted emotions she had experienced.

On the bright side there were many passages of delightful prose, and observations of the creative process which I enjoyed. But it was hard to relate to the main character and why she would choose to stay connected to such uninteresting men as William and Stephen. Clearly the author invested a lot of energy and emotion in creating this story and bringing all the art and literature references to us, but the underlying story just didn't work for me.

Kristen says

I was on board with Bialosky for the first 2/3 of the book.

I overlooked the cheesy characterization of her main character having two different color eyes, just so you know that she is 'of two minds.' I got quite tired of the descriptions of the different shades of her eyes in response to outside stimulus. People saw what they wanted to see in her.

I also had a hard time with the parallels of Eleanor's life with Anna Karenina. It was a stretch at best, I felt like I was being led and then pushed.

I loved how scholarly it was. I loved how Eleanor's 'awakening' happened while she is alone in Paris, working on her paper and herself. Her emails with another literary scholar re: Romanticism and poetry were some of my favorite parts. I enjoyed that the majority of the novel takes place in "the life room." Her tumultuous inner turmoil and betrayal does not match the quiet outside life she lives, (much like her eyes, see... see...). While her inner conflict is tearing her apart, she continues her duties - to pick the kids up from school, make dinner and pick up the dry cleaning.

I find Bialosky to be an interesting writer, and that is the only reason I made it through the whole book. Would I recommend this book? No. It misses the mark and instead of being a story of self-discovery and growth, it comes off as privileged and impotent.

Oh poor Eleanor, she is beautiful and pained. The subject of paintings, married to a surgeon and mother to two lovely boys. But CAN'T YOU SEE HER PAIN?! HER HUSBAND DOESN'T GET HER!

Lisa says

I loved this book! Interesting and intellectual. Has a lot of art/scholarly references but it's relatable and entertaining and talks a lot about interpersonal relationships. Not a totally happy story, but it read really quickly and easily. Good book to read while on vacation.

Lori says

I liked the concept. I like any novel that explores art and literature because I find it intellectually stimulating. While I would recommend this book, I definitely don't consider it a well written novel or that great of a story.

I didn't like the character of Eleanor and I don't think she was truly developed or anything remotely like Anna Karenina despite the author's overblown attempts to make her comparable. If anything it is the men to whom Eleanor attaches herself that are tragic. The author takes you on this journey that you believe must end in tragedy and yet it doesn't. Basically, Eleanor is having a midlife crisis.

I especially disliked how the author switched out of narrative into journal entries for Eleanor's trip to Paris; however it is a novel that explores issues I find interesting- a woman's sexuality and romantic desires.

Jennifer Paisley Schuch says

this is a frustrating book. I'm exhausted after reading just a few pages... I feel like the author is trying to make the main character deep, thought provoking, emotionally torn blah blah blah... but she just tries too hard, too much of a struggle, to the point it just seems over exaggerated. and I normally love the conflicted self type of book. I'll continue reading just because I can't stand to put yet another book down unfinished.

Robin says

Maybe I cannot judge this book, because I did not finish it. I disliked mostly all the characters so much that the thought of being with them any longer was more than I could take. I stopped reading it so all I can say, is that it was not for me.

Dana says

This is taking me awhile, which is very unusual, but I'm enjoying it while simultaneously being made uncomfortable.

Carelisle Jaenn Hermosada Cabalan says

3 Stars!!!

Eleanor Cahn's blue and green eye are beautiful and somehow she is a twisted woman. She has four men in her life, Michael; her husband, Adam, the married artist she had encountered with, William, her teenage boyfriend and Stephen, her childhood friend.

This book actually made me realize how difficult it is to delimit your emotions especially if you're a married woman. This character (Eleanor) felt an urge to cheat on her husband due to her unfinished business with Stephen. She knows she'd lose everything if she'd abscond with Stephen... luckily, Stephen didn't want to ruin her family.

Okay, the first half was kind'a boring but the story of a Literature Professor was interesting, her past, the things she'd study in her trip in Paris, it made me think about reading Tolstoy's Anna Karenina.

It's a good book.

Thank you Ms. Bialosky for sharing this.

Lisa says

I think I may have read one too many stifled, married woman books lately. Or maybe too much "Anna Karenina" based stuff recently. Or both. But this one just didn't do it for me. Bialosky can write beautifully. But I didn't like any of the adults (although I'm not sure I was supposed to but I should at least care about what happens to them). And the last 100+ pages dragged for me. I would probably give it 2.5 stars if that were an option.

Reading it for a book club (and reading it well ahead of the rest of the group) led me to take notes so I could remember things I wanted to talk about (and there is a lot to talk about). That made it feel a little too much like homework which may have colored my take on the book.

Nancy says

The writing is beautiful in this book, but the author doesn't have much for her main character to say. She's whiney, self-involved, and boring. It's too bad, because the book starts out strong. I couldn't read it all.
