



## **Stella Descending**

*Linn Ullmann*

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## **Stella Descending** Linn Ullmann

On a warm night in Oslo, Martin draws Stella into one of the risky games that have defined their ten years together: a balancing act on the edge of their rooftop, seven storeys up. Amid the shouts of horrified onlookers, Stella stumbles, falling for a moment into Martin's arms before plummeting to her death. Did he try to save her?

This is the question that begins Linn Ullmann's transfixing tale of Stella: a jealous wife, compliant mistress, treasured friend, angelic nurse, unloved daughter, devoted mother, and - finally - a woman possessed of a secret now forever lost to the living.

## **Stella Descending Details**

Date : Published 2005 by Picador USA (first published 2000)

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Author : Linn Ullmann

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## From Reader Review Stella Descending for online ebook

### Gillian Edwards says

Even better the second time around.

Stella and Martin, a married couple are standing on the roof of their apartment block. They embrace, then Stella falls to her death. Was she pushed or did she fall? The story covers the descriptions of the witnesses, views of Stella and her life from her husband, daughter Amanda, her elderly friend. A really good read,

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### Tanisa Samaddar says

This was my first book of Linn Ullmann's and honestly, I was very disappointed. The synopsis at the back of the book was intriguing and it really piqued my interest. But as I kept reading it, it got more and more boring and then I was bound to skip some pages. Hate me if you think this book was awesome, because I clearly don't see the point of reading a book where a mystery isn't solved. Maybe that was the whole point of Ullmann writing this novel, but to me it was precious time wasted.

Some of the narrative was good, but then it was very repetitive. I haven't read many books that I can judge this one negatively, but I have read enough books to tell that this wasn't really a good one.

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### Kristin says

I'm searching for the word that describes this novel. It's dark, weird, wry, and complicated... It's perceptive, yet veiled, obsessive, yet unfocused. It was fun to spend time with it, but exhausting, too. It's... it's... NORWEGIAN. Yeah, that's it, that's the word. Norwegian.

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### Teresa says

I read this because I enjoyed her first novel, *Before You Sleep*, was even impressed by it, perhaps because I came to it with no expectations, but I did admire its prose and structure. This, her second book, is just 'eh.' I almost stopped reading near the beginning, but since it read quick, I continued on. If it had been any longer, I think I would've gotten aggravated, as its repetitive prose (which sometimes has its place) was starting to get to me.

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### John Brookes says

A key reason for reading "Stella Descending" (by Linn Ullmann) was that I was intrigued by the premise, which centres around the repercussions of a single, tragic event. On 27 August 2000 the Stella of the title plunges nine stories off a rooftop to her death. For reasons never fully explained, she was up there with Martin, her husband. It is unclear whether she jumped, fell, or was pushed – and this forms the dramatic crux of this novel.

Stella and Martin were together for over a decade. They have a daughter, Bee who is ten - a silent, introspective child whom, we learn, Martin was never able to bond with. Stella also has another child, fifteen-year-old Amanda, though her father is long out of the picture. As well as providing emotional support to Bee, Amanda shares with the reader her view of events: which are seen through the prism of her transition from childhood to adolescence; ageing in a confusing environment where reality is cryptic and fantasy the day-to-day norm. For instance Amanda describes to Bee, in vivid detail, her rationalisation of her mother's descent:

"We say that Mama is falling little by little, day by day, kind of in bits: first a finger, then an eye, and then a knee, and then a foot, then a toe, and then another toe." Amanda says. "I tell Bee...that Mama falls and falls and never hits the ground." On her way down, Amanda explains, Stella meets birds flying south, a squirrel fallen from a tree, a cod fished from water. "Maybe Mama will meet Granny, too, I say; God must have kicked Granny out of heaven a long time ago, she was so grumpy and tight-lipped."

"Stella Descending" is actually narrated by several characters, including eyewitness accounts from the three passers-by who witnessed the fatal fall. There is also some commentary from special investigator Corinne Danielsen (an overweight, ageing detective who can sense a murderer through her stomach rumblings, yet - for such a potentially interesting character - she remains strangely in the background of this novel). There are also accounts and reflections by Amanda (but not Bee), Axel (an old man Stella befriended in a hospital she worked at), and even Stella herself. In addition there is a transcript of a video recording Martin and Stella made on the day of her death (ostensibly to record their possessions for insurance purposes, although the transcripts serve more to provide a voyeuristic view of the increasing disconnection in their relationship: a rather sad documentation of inevitable dissolution).

Of all of the above narrators, a major figure is the aged curmudgeon Axel who has lived for thirty years in his "temporary" apartment in a nondescript section of Oslo. "I am not usually in harmony with my surroundings," Axel explains. "In fact, I detest my surroundings, and my surroundings detest me."

Despite an apparent lack of common ground, Axel and Stella become close friends. Axel is in love or what passes for him as such. Stella senses a sympathetic ear. They meet when Axel is hospitalised. Stella is his nurse. Their friendship coincides with the beginning of Stella's relationship with Martin, so Axel provides a unique perspective. "Stella was too good for him," Axel says, describing Martin. "In my view he is a conceited ass... he is a brute, but he did not kill her. Such things do, after all, take a courage of sorts."

All of these accounts focus on the fall and its aftermath (especially the day of Stella's funeral), but include reminiscences going back years. Some are only related second-hand - it is Corinne who recounts much of what Martin has to say, for example - and events and occurrences (including the fall itself) are often seen through different eyes. On a thematic note, Axel is fascinated by Ferris wheels, and it is like one of these that the story keeps returning to the same places.

The novel presents an interesting mix of voices: old Axel, who has also become an important anchor for Amanda, suspicious Corinne, calmly nostalgic Stella. Much doesn't seem particularly significant at first - or even almost too trivial to bother with - but it's a fine web Ullmann spins, and ultimately a coherent picture of the relationships between these characters emerges. However, this is a novel of separation more than connection: of unbridgeable gaps, the inability to truly communicate and to hold fast to each other - making for a novel that is both affecting and yet also profoundly melancholy.

"Stella Descending" doesn't come to a neat, clean murder-mystery conclusion - it's nowhere near that simple: although it does read like a mystery of sorts. On balance, this has been an ideal, and enjoyable,

representation for my journey to Norway.

As an aside, author Linn Ullmann is the daughter of acclaimed Norwegian actress, Liv Ullmann, and the equally esteemed Swedish director, Ingmar Bergman. Hard acts to follow, but Ullmann acquits herself well here, in what was her second novel.

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### **metaphor says**

Unpredictability and distinctive style are the main reasons why I love Norwegian authors. They are revealing the soul...

*I wonder what he's thinking. Maybe he's not thinking about anything. Maybe he's thinking about me. Maybe he's thinking that everything has turned to ashes. That we all went up in flames anyway.*

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### **Sanna says**

I remember seeing a review of this book when it first came out years ago and I wanted to read it. It took me years to finally get around to it and sadly the book turned out to be a major disappointment. While Ullmann does have a skill with language, the characters are a bit dull and for a long time the story doesn't really seem to go anywhere. All in all, it's a very unlikeable book and I had a hard time finishing it. I was very close to giving up half way through and getting to the end didn't reward me either.

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### **Gretel says**

Ullmann is definitely a talented author; she has her own way with words and her own definitive style, but I found this to be such an annoying book. The story doesn't lead anywhere and the structure in which it is told is nonsensical to me. I can't put my finger on it but so many of the characters are unbearably smug. There's not a single likeable character in here. I remember in Ullmann's other books *The Blessed Child* and *Grace* there are unlikeable characters, but we are told about them in a way that makes them fascinating. *Stella Descending* does not do that. Early on I find I didn't care whether Stella jumped or was pushed, and part of me wishes I left this on the shelf.

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### **Moa says**

Pretentious, waffling, dull. Not a fan.

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### **Narine Gizharyan says**

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### **Sara says**

The crux of the story is whether Stella fell to her death, or whether she was pushed? But if you are expecting a crime story, you will be disappointed.

This book goes off on so many tangents that are nonsensical and irrelevant to the main plot. And once you have persevered through all of that, you are not even rewarded an answer in the end.

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### **Patti's Book Nook says**

Whew! These poor miserable characters. Stella Vold has just plummeted 9 floors to her death after being embraced/shoved by her husband in a strange rooftop dance. The narrative is then cleverly told in vignettes by the investigating cop, three witnesses, her eldest daughter Amanda, a curmudgeonly old man Axel, her husband Martin, and oddly by Stella herself. This form simultaneously reveals information about her entire life and also speculation by these characters into what might have been the reason for her demise. Her "descent" has many meanings besides death- the fall from her mother's womb at childbirth, her fall into sickness and subsequent recovery, her fear of flying, and her fall from happiness to name a few. I appreciated the originality. It was a tough one because it was extremely difficult for me to connect with the complete and utter lack of joy of anyone. Peculiar, bizarre, and a compelling quick read. Perfect length because I'm not sure I could have stayed with any of these people much longer!

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### **Simay Yildiz says**

For English, please visit Community BookStop.  
Bu yaz?n?n orijinali canlabirsene'de yay?nland?.

Olay?m?z ?u: Stella ve Martin çifte, kitab?n ba?lar?nda nedenini bilmedi?imiz bir ?ekilde oturduklar? binan?n çat?s?na ç?karlar. Ve Stella a?a?? dü?er. Görgü tan?klar?n?n baz?lar? kavga etti?klerini dü?ünür

ancak bir noktada kucakla?t?klar?n? hepsi görmü?tür. Tabii polisin ve pek çok insan?n akl?ndaki soru ?u: Martin, Stella'y? itti mi?

Öncelikle ?unu belirtmem laz?m; Stella Dü?erken, konusal olarak olmasa da yap?sal olarak bana ba??ndan itibaren çok sevdi?im Marquez'in en sevdi?im kitab? K?rm?z? Pazartesi'yi hat?rlatt?. K?rm?z? Pazartesi'de Santiago Nasar'?n öldürülece?ini en ba??ndan nas?l biliyorsak Stella Dü?erken de Stella'n?n öldü?ünü ve nas?l öldü?ünü en ba??ndan biliyoruz. Ve yine K?rm?z? Pazartesi'de oldu?u gibi Stella Dü?erken'de de olaylar?n ayr?nt?lar?, nedeni ve niçini kitab?n ilerleyen bölümlerinde ortaya ç?karak en sonunda tamamen anla??l?yor. Tamamen anla??l?yor demek de yanl?? asl?nda; 'biraz ayd?nlan?yor' desek daha do?ru çünkü Stella'n?n dü?ü?ündeki neden ba?ta tahmin etti?iniz nedenler olmayacak büyük ihtimalle.

Hikaye, Stella'n?n birlikte oldu?u ve çat?da onunla olan Martin, Stella'n?n ilk kocas?ndan olan k?z? Amanda, Stella'ya a??k olan ihtiyar Alex ve dedektif Corinne taraf?ndan anlat?l?yor. Arada Stella'n?n bölümleri ve görü tan?klar?n?n ifadeleri de var. Ve hatta bölüm bölüm Stella ve Martin'in sigorta ?irketi için çektileri videodan bölümleri de görebiliyoruz. San?r?m ölen o oldu?u içindir, ben en ba??ndan beri inan?lmaz bir sempati duydum Stella'ya ve Martin'i suçlad?m durum ölümü için. Hatta kad?n? çat?dan itti?ine emindim bile diyebilirim. Stella'yla ili?kisi ba?layana kadar abart? bir 'playboy' oldu?unu, Amanda'y? hiç sevmedi?ini, hatta Stella'dan olan k?z? Bee'yi bir canavar gibi gördü?ü de buna eklenince hiç ama hiç ho?lanmad?m adamdan. Tabii kitap ilerledikçe ke?fettim ki kitaptaki tüm karakterler (ki insan?n içimi en çok s?zlatan küçük Amanda'n?n durumu oldu) ayr? manyak.

Biraz karanl?k, hafiften kafa kar??t?r?c?, insanlar?n içindeki pislikleri surat?n?za vura vura ortaya koyan bir roman arayanlara ?iddetle tavsiye ediyorum.

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### **Lorri Steinbacher says**

Did Stella slip and fall or was she pushed? This is the narrative driver in this book, but what you peer into in the meantime is the inner workings of various relationships--between mothers and daughters, between lover and beloved, between old and young, between plumber and client. It's a slim volume and there's a lot going on, many of the characters are, unbeknownst to them, intermingled with stories that others are telling. It's a strange book, particularly strange because you expect that the pivotal question--did Stella slip and fall or was she pushed?--will be answered as vaguely as the novel proceeds. And yet, Ullman seemingly answers the question unambiguously. Or does she?

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### **Alison Petchell says**

Nope - I didn't get it. Found the book a bit of a chore to get through, didn't like the characters, didn't like eternal references to visceral images, didn't like anything about it

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