



Lost in the Forest

Sue Miller

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For nearly two decades, since the publication of her iconic first novel, *The Good Mother*, Sue Miller has distinguished herself as one of our most elegant and widely celebrated chroniclers of family life, with a singular gift for laying bare the interior lives of her characters. In each of her novels, Miller has written with exquisite precision about the experience of grace in daily life—the sudden, epiphanic recognition of the extraordinary amid the ordinary—as well as the sharp and unexpected motions of the human heart away from it, toward an unruly netherworld of upheaval and desire. But never before have Miller’s powers been keener or more transfixing than they are in *Lost in the Forest*, a novel set in the vineyards of Northern California that tells the story of a young girl who, in the wake of a tragic accident, seeks solace in a damaging love affair with a much older man.

Eva, a divorced and happily remarried mother of three, runs a small bookstore in a town north of San Francisco. When her second husband, John, is killed in a car accident, her family’s fragile peace is once again overtaken by loss. Emily, the eldest, must grapple with newfound independence and responsibility. Theo, the youngest, can only begin to fathom his father’s death. But for Daisy, the middle child, John’s absence opens up a world of bewilderment, exposing her at the onset of adolescence to the chaos and instability that hover just beyond the safety of parental love. In her sorrow, Daisy embarks on a harrowing sexual odyssey, a journey that will cast her even farther out onto the harsh promontory of adulthood and lost hope.

With astonishing sensuality and immediacy, *Lost in the Forest* moves through the most intimate realms of domestic life, from grief and sex to adolescence and marriage. It is a stunning, kaleidoscopic evocation of a family in crisis, written with delicacy and masterful care. For her lifelong fans and those just discovering Sue Miller for the first time, here is a rich and gorgeously layered tale of a family breaking apart and coming back together again: Sue Miller at her inimitable best.

From the Hardcover edition.

Lost in the Forest Details

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From Reader Review Lost in the Forest for online ebook

Sam - Spines in a Line says

I'm surprised so many people have given this book poor ratings but that's likely due to the slightly disturbing content of the story. It's about a family that goes through a rough time and some members of the family act out. There are some 'icky' moments among, especially, the children that probably put people off. I found the book well-written and felt that the author was among those who found the events disturbing, as they were portrayed that way. There was no attempt on the part of the writing to excuse these acts. Some may prefer that these events didn't occur but they do go on in the world and it was good to see them from the 'victim's' perspective as a way of seeing why it happens, what leads people to these choices.

A story about a broken family, more suited to older readers.

Judy says

Another can't-put-it-down novel by Sue Miller -- as harrowing as "The Good Mother," but with a happier ending. This novel is told by an unseen narrator from three perspectives, with loose enough boundaries that the story flows seamlessly along and you don't immediately realize that it's someone else's experiences you're learning about.

First there is Jake, a 40-something divorced wine grape grower in Napa. His former wife, Eva, has remarried and as the story begins, Eva's husband John has just been hit by a car and killed. Jake takes in their two daughters, Emily and Daisy and the little boy, Theo, who is John and Eva's son, so that Eva can have a little space to absorb her shock and grief. Jake and Eva have some good conversations, and Jake develops a fondness for Theo, who is too young to understand that his father is gone for good. In fact, Jake wonders if he might be able to woo Eva back into the life they shared before.

The story continues with a focus on Eva, but also relates the reactions of Emily and Daisy to this new upheaval in their lives as Emily prepares for college and 14-year old Daisy struggles with her feelings of abandonment by the adults in her life as they cope with their own grief.

Eventually we learn more about how Daisy copes with the loss of her beloved stepfather -- definitely not in a healthy way, but I'll avoid any spoilers here.

Most of the story takes place within about a year from John's death, but the last chapter is staged ten years later when many of the initial questions and dilemmas have been resolved -- or at least laid down. It's a great read, and I would thank the person who recommended this book to me but I can't remember who it was. I, however, recommend it to YOU.

Philip says

In Lost In The Forest, Sue Miller inhabits the family. It's an extended family, of course, extended in the twenty-first century Anglo-Saxon sense of it being stretched and disrupted by divorce, re-marriage and identity-seeking children. The book starts in what seems to be a conventional setting. Mark and Eva have

been divorced for several years. Their two daughters, Emily and Daisy, are approaching adolescence. Theo, their brother, is a toddler, the son of Eva's second husband, John. Eva's first marriage to Mark was an exciting and unpredictable affair. The second with John has been a steadier, more reliable experience, perhaps better suited to the anticipated ennui of middle age.

But then an accident claims John's life and Eva must cope with three children, a household, managing her bookshop and, indeed, her own life alone. She turns back to Mark, who is keen and willing to help.

As its domestic drama unfolds, *Lost In The Forest* begins to transform itself. What the reader expected to be a tale of relationships rekindled and rediscovered abruptly changes to focus on the younger daughter, Daisy. Daze, as she is called by her father, rarely lives up to either of her names. She is neither the innocent flower, nor the dreamy-headed teenager. Slowly, she reveals herself as a pretty ruthless manipulator of events with an apparently natural talent for exploiting events to her own advantage.

Daisy's story becomes a tangle of deception. We are led to believe that she also deceives herself and in later years must seek counselling, but this does not square with her clear control of events at the time. Her sexual awakening becomes the exploitation of another, despite its beginnings being founded on threat.

Lost In The Forest is a credible tale. Daisy is a complex character in some ways. In others, she is merely and crudely selfish. Her sister, Emily, drifts in and out of the story, as does her mother Eva, with neither apparently aware of the subterfuge. Eventually, the domestic setting of the book cannot sustain the forensic examination of motive and reaction. These people seem to be obsessed with their own myopic personal relationships to the exclusion of all else. This aspect of the book eventually leads to non-sequitur, since Daisy's eventual admission of what transpired between her and another of the characters would, in reality, have led to disgrace, perhaps prosecution. But in the book it is only Daisy's own personal emotional response that figures.

In the final analysis, time passes. We all grow up and we are all a bit older. As Duncan, a family friend and a significant protagonist in the plot, proclaims, "We're Americans... We don't want to understand how. We just want to press the button and be happy." It's ironic, then, that an entire genre of fiction should have developed to focus on the dysfunctional family and its associated traumas and unhappiness. *Lost In The Forest* is a good read. It is highly erotic at times. And it is very much of this self-obsessed genre.

Nancy says

This book was....disturbing. I know it was supposed to be but there were many instances of TMI, just too much information about things you don't care to know. Details that do not move the story forward and leave you thinking, what the heck? Like when the main character wakes up in the morning and goes to the bathroom....do we really need to know the exact physical feeling of urinating? Well there are many examples but suffice it to say now and then I would just become disgusted and yell, "gross!" and throw the book down for a couple days. But it was interesting enough to keep picking back up and just cross my fingers that the TMI incidents were over.

Adverbs are a pet peeve for me, and I found a strange one in this book: phlegmily!! Someone's voice sounded phlegmily apparently but she couldn't think of a better way to say it so, phlegmily it is! Well anyway, I didn't find a lot of adverbs so I guess it's ok with me if the author wants to make one up!

The ending was anti-climactic, but I guess it was ok. There were elements of the story that I didn't find believable, especially the series of events that lead to how the antagonist ends up. I wasn't wild about this book but I would recommend it.

Kolleen says

SPOILERS This book was neither outstanding or terrible, it just was. Overall, I liked it, it just wasn't a page-turner, and I'm not exactly sure I would recommend it. The story is ultimately about the heartbreaking reality of the mundane, everyday life... about how sometimes, life isn't happy or end happy, life just is. Although this story was about death, I feel it centered on the infidelity of Eva, the main character's, former husband. The affair led to the demise of the entire family, and we see how it trickled down and effected everyone involved.

I found this story also to be mainly about Daisy (not the main character) who was the child that seemed to take the affair and divorce the hardest. She deals with the abandonment of her father, the death of her stepfather and confidant (the only one helping her through the divorce), and the separation of her sister at college. It shows an honest portrayal of the possible effects divorce can have on some children, like her seeking a father figure or attention through Duncan (which thoroughly intrigued me and grossed me out all at the same time).

This book was extremely sexual, so don't read it if you get uncomfortable reading these sorts of things. In fact, in one part, there is a very descriptive passage on oral sex of a *heavily* menstruating woman! I'll let you read that for yourself. Anyways, all in all it had some good lessons to take from it, a few good passages and quotes, but that's about all it cracked up to be.

Heather says

Rating: D-

Review: This is the second of Miller's books that I've read, and I'm finding that she has some consistent patterns. Some are good patterns, things that keep you reading; some are bad patterns, things that make you want to throw the book at the wall (or at least roll your eyes hard enough to harm your vision).

The Good Pattern: She loves the theme of messy marriages. And she's right, it's not easy. I like reading about the way she writes marriages. The way she talks about the boring aspects of being married, etc., and the way that the person you've been married to for years (or decades) can still surprise you.

The Bad Pattern: She loves the theme of sexual exploration, but she's a prude about it. For example, instead of using the word "vagina," or any of its myriad slang synonyms, she calls it "sex." Like, in this book, she

talks about one character's "sex" clicking when she opens her legs. Really? You called it her "sex"? That's just stupid. I'm not opposed to the idea of using sexuality as a motif or backdrop used to tell the story of discovery, but don't be so weird about it. Her writing comes off as if she wants to talk about sex, but she's embarrassed. Either do it well, or don't do it all (and I'm speaking of writing here, if you know what I mean).

I think I'm done with Sue Miller. I've got her figured out. I don't disagree that marriage is messy. I don't disagree that sexuality is a complex part of our persona. I just don't, personally, need to read her narratives of it because it can be done better.

I didn't want to finish this book. It was going nowhere fast, but she did have a good thing going in that the perspective of Daisy is told from a bit of flash-back, and you want to know how she comes out in the end. For that, she kept me reading (begrudgingly). I finished, but just barely. Hence, her D- grade.

Recommendation: I recommend that you skip this book and read other books in the category of women's fiction.

Vic says

Ok, I am a Sue Miller fan. I like books that deal with the interior life of the characters in the book and she really does this well. I think of her as being in the genre of Anne Tyler.

Spoiler alert: The following contains information concerning the plot.

In this book, within the first few pages, Eva's husband is killed in a car- pedestrian accident. The book focuses on the transition of Eva, her ex-husband, Mark, and her children through this fallout of the tragedy. But, just saying this leaves out the multi-texture look at the past and present relationships between the parties. Eva and Mark's past relationship, his desire to get back together with Eva, his relationships with his children, his daughter Daisy's acting out both out of her feelings of loss and her feelings of social isolation due to her awkward adolescent feelings about herself. This includes a very sexual relationship with a much older, creepy and manipulative married man.

The working through of these issues is what I really liked. Eva's knowing that she could not go back with Mark due to the past baggage, despite her desire for intimacy in light of her husband's death, Marks' growth in maturity, allowing him for the first time to truly be their for Daisy.

Some of the story seemed too pat: The fantastic nature of Eva and Mark's relationship, followed by her immediate throwing him out upon learning of an affair during the difficulty of bringing up children, the relationship of Daisy with the evil older man, the happy ending for all. But, given the surrounding character studies, I still liked it.

Erica says

I full-up admit that I wanted to read this book because the summary said the middle child in a grief-stricken family embarks upon a journey to figure out who she is and what she means to the greater world via sexual exploration with a much older man. This Lolita topic is something that always piques my interest, probably

because of my own not-even-anything-like-that experiences; I think it's a topic that I want to know more about, hear more about, because I am still trying to put my own thoughts on the matter into some sort of coherence.

So, yes, I was drawn in by the titillating lure of childhood sexual abuse because, apparently, I am a sicko. Not a big surprise there.

But guess what? That's not what this book is about. Whereas I had assumed, via the book's summary, that this would be a look at how divorce and then, later, the death of a beloved stepfather impacts the three children of the family, it was more about the parents, Eva and Mark, and how they survived both their divorce and then the death of John, Eva's husband after Mark. And about sex. I was actually a little surprised at how everything seemed to come down to sex. Sex was the reason for the divorce. After John died, Eva wanted sex and she reminisced on the sexual differences between Mark and John. Mark wanted sex but couldn't always get it because sometimes the kids were at his house. Eva's BFF, Gracie, wanted sex and not marriage. Gracie got married and the sex was great. Emily tells Daisy about sex. Daisy learns about sex, though a weird form of sex. Sex Sex Sex. I guess marketing has it spot-on: It really is all about sex. And when sex isn't the topic, the rest of life shows up and does its thing, but then it's back to sex.

It sounds like I have a problem with sex. And you'd think that I'd have been ready for it, since I was expecting, essentially, child-molestation but you know what? I didn't expect it everywhere, all the time. But the ending explains that the sex was important to the story, via Daisy's amazing revelations about herself and her childhood.

So why was I left unimpressed by this book?

Well, I was put off by the clunky movement of time. Time does not unfold in a mysterious fashion, but in a confusing way. For instance, Gracie goes off on a rant about how Eva should remarry but Gracie won't ever marry because she likes having lots of guys and doesn't want to settle down with one. Essentially. Then a few chapters later, Gracie's husband walks onto the scene and I was all, "What? Who is this guy? Gracie's not married!" Only, she is now and they explain it a little later and that was confusing. There were also grown-up Daisy at the therapist, written in here and there as needed, though I didn't realize there was going to be grown-up Daisy moments until they started cropping up. This type of loop happened with too much regularity for my brain. It hurt my ability to follow the story and it made me feel lost. Maybe that was the point, so that I would feel lost like Daisy. But I never felt like Daisy. I felt like a confused reader.

And The Mexicans. What was going on with The Mexicans? Why did they come up? Like, three or four times, randomly, throughout the book, The Mexicans were mentioned for no apparent reason and seemingly out of context. Mark is driving somewhere and there's no one out on the streets except for this one area where there's a group of The Mexicans. And then nothing else was said about it. Until the next time someone mentions The Mexicans. ??? What on earth?

(view spoiler)

Also bothersome was the supreme effort to place this story in a certain period of time without ever *saying* what period of time we were in. It was made overly obvious - they were discussing whether or not to go see "A Fish Called Wanda" at the theater; party talk was of Salman Rushdie (which made me think of Renee Zellweger as Bridget Jones, vacuuming her apartment and saying "Salman" in a thousand different ways); they made George Bush (not GW) jokes. I think one of the kids even had a birth year mentioned. So, I get it. I can do the math. I was alive during that time period. But was it necessary to be so very hint-dropping instead of just saying This All Happened In the Late 1980's? Maybe that was actually said at some point. I don't remember, now. I just remember rolling my eyes at the unnecessary reference points to time frame.

The writing is good. I imagine I'll want to check out other books by this author and I will just hope they are not misleading in their summaries and I will also hope that they're not so over-the-top smacking me in the head with "GUESS WHEN THIS TAKES PLACE? GUESS, GUESS, GUESSSSS!" But this one? It was just ok. I don't know if I would recommend it but I'm glad I listened to it despite not getting what I wanted from it.

Kris - My Novelesque Life says

3 STARS

"One minute John is the cornerstone of Eva's world, rock to his two teenage stepdaughters and his own son Theo; the next he is tossed through the air in a traffic accident. His sudden death changes everything. Eva struggles with the desolation of loneliness, finding herself drawn back to her untrustworthy ex-husband; Emily, the eldest daughter, grapples with her new-found independence and responsibility. Little Theo can only begin to fathom the permanence of his father's death. But for the middle child Daisy, John's absence opens up a whole world of confusion. Just at the onset of adolescence and blossoming sexuality, Daisy is exposed to the terrifying duplicity of life, the instability that hovers just beyond the safety of parental love, and the powerlessness of that love to protect or even console her. In steps a man only too willing to take advantage of her emotions." (From Amazon)

This was not my favourite of Sue Miller's novels but it was an interesting read.

Misti says

So I got this book for about a quarter at a video/bookstore going out of business sale. I picked it up because I knew I had read something by this author before that I had enjoyed. I didn't really enjoy this one. It had potential but I couldn't get over how disturbed I was by certain things that were going on; it's very hard as a mother especially to read. I was just cringing too much to really get into the story.

Courtney says

I stumbled across Miller in an attempt to find authors who had a similar style to Wally Lamb. I checked out 2 of her works from the library, The World Below and this one. I read World Below first and wasn't impressed so I was hesitant to even read this book...but I'm really glad I did. I felt the characters in this writing were far more developed. I felt for and loved almost all of them (with the exception of Emily, the eldest, but I think that's due to the fact she wasn't given much "airtime").

One reader comment stated that this book was "disturbing", which I think is highly dramatic. Yes, while it does deal with some heavy issues...death, divorce, sexual abuse, family dynamics... it was far from the type of book that makes you feel as though you need a shower after having read it. In fact (and I might be entirely alone in this) I didn't hate the abuser in this book...actually I didn't even dislike him. I'm not saying I condoned the actions, just simply that it's written in such a way that you can almost see the humanity in the situation.

Overall, I think it was a beautiful book that though simply written still managed to be thought provoking and touching.

Holly says

I'm pretty sure *Lost in the Forest* went on my TBR list because Donald Maass used it as an example in one of his books. If not, who knows what I was thinking. These are my opinions only and in no way reflect on the inherent value of the book, or the author, or people who enjoyed the story.

Don't you just hate it when you come across a book you know you should like, and you just can't, no matter how hard you try? That's how this one was for me. The beginning was terrific, started off with a bang and pulled me right in... Sadly, it dropped me by the end of the third chapter. The story isn't badly told in any obvious way, but I didn't stay engaged with the characters, and I never figured out when the action--which there wasn't much of--took place.

Maybe I would have liked it better if there was more sensory detail, but that's only a guess. It's also possible these characters are too much like real people to work for me in fiction. Life's too short to lie awake worrying about it though. =(

Katie Addison says

While I somewhat enjoyed this book and its characters, I felt like there was a lot of explaining and describing and too little action and dialogue. And usually that style of writing tends to appeal to me, but something about this story... It's just too drawn out. I literally would skip a paragraph here and there because it felt so redundant and irrelevant to the overall story, which was interesting in parts, but hardly substantial. I did enjoy the characters and the way Miller switched between their perspectives. There were certain points when I couldn't put the book down, and other points when I had to power through to the next interesting point; overall, I feel like this book earned 3 stars and no more.

Sheryl Sorrentino says

3.5. I am really not sure what to make of this one.

Sharon says

I'm so glad that I found this author. Her book is a beautiful and sometimes haunting story of a family and the experiences that shape their lives individually and as a family unit.

Eva is the mom and her story is in the background of the family's lives, though Daisy, the middle daughter, has the most compelling story.

I found myself wanting Eva and Mark to get back together, and I liked them together. They had divorced due

to Mark's infidelity and Eva got remarried to John, and the story begins with John's untimely death.

John's death affected Daisy the most, who saw him as a father figure, someone even closer to her than her own father. Mark comes to realize in the end of the story that he hasn't been "there" for his daughters through their adolescent struggles.

Daisy is vulnerable and silent, and her adolescence is shaped by a lack of attention and affection. She feels that no one loves her and is not as attractive as her older sister, Emily. She is angry and she acts out in ways such as stealing money from her mother's bookstore.

This vulnerability leads her to become involved with an older man who is married to her mother's best friend. This man witnesses her stealing the money and he buys her silence by telling her that she has to "do something for him."

This takes the form of his engaging in sexual acts with her / for her (never intercourse) and she comes to enjoy and depend on this power that she feels over him. The sickening part is how this man uses his power and persuasion to encourage her to let him touch her.

Eventually, Mark finds out about this affair with Duncan and realizes that what he hasn't provided for Daisy in terms of being there for her, she has filled this need for affection/comfort in the unlikely choice of Duncan. Mark also makes a deal with Daisy, which is that he wants her to live with him in order for him to be a better father for her. This is how the relations between Duncan and Daisy finally end.

The ending was one of the most touching parts for me...we hear about everyone's lives 15 years later. Emily is married with 2 kids, Theo is in college, Eva is still dating Elliott (she says she will never remarry), Daisy is an actress and underwear/hand model!

They all meet again for Mark's wedding. In Theo's letters to Daisy, he remembers the stories (that began: "once there was a little boy lost in the forest") that they used to tell at the dinner table and asks if they were meant for him, or if it was just something they did. Daisy answers sarcastically, but lets him know that the stories were all about him, and they always had a happy ending.

At the table during the celebration before Mark's wedding...another story is told...this time for Gideon, Emily's son, and Theo is able to participate in the story. It was a touching part for me because it alludes to the cyclical nature of our lives, and the inevitability of our growing older and repeating our memories for our younger generations.

We also hear about Daisy's relating of her story to her therapist, and the way that her life changed for the better when she moved in with Mark.

The relationships are fascinating and Sue Miller is a very talented author.
