



The First Desire

Nancy Reisman

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When Sadie looks out her window and sees her bother standing on the front lawn she knows he can't bring good news. Fidgeting over coffee with sugar and cream he explains: Their sister is gone. Three days earlier Goldie left to go shopping and she has not returned. With Goldie's disappearance as the catalyst, **The First Desire** takes us deep into the life of the Cohen family and Buffalo, New York, from the Great Depression to the years immediately following World War II. Shifting perspectives from siblings Sadie, Jo, Goldie, and Irving we learn of the secrets they have managed to keep hidden--and of Lillian, the beautiful woman their father took as a lover while his wife was dying. In this astonishing novel Reisman brings to life the love, grief, and desires that ultimately bind one family together.

The First Desire Details

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Author : Nancy Reisman

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From Reader Review The First Desire for online ebook

Merry says

I just re-discovered the identity of this book. A good book, but very special to me because it is about a Jewish family in Buffalo during the first half of the 20th century, including a psychotic sister named Celia. All true of the paternal side of my family. Most was from before I was born, but a real sense of a community that was familiar with and wanted to know more about. Nostalgic, moody.

Linda says

Well done novel of a Jewish/American Buffalo, NY family from 1929 through WW2. The strength of this book is in the author's ability to draw out the characters of the family members, the flaws, the strengths, their secrets, traditions, and of course love.

Lori says

Well written but slow moving story that doesn't really go anywhere interesting. My 3 rating is only because it's technically well done but I would not recommend this based on storytelling basics. I started the book three times and only finally forced myself to finish because I was reading it as an example of unique character development and book structure (for my own writing purposes).

Judith says

Hadn't realized when I started it that I had read it already ten years ago. That means it was less than memorable -- dark and psychological study, like Sinclair's Wasteland. Jewish Buffalo quite incidental.

Cynthia Vengraitis says

It started out really well but I felt disappointed by the end. Beautifully written albeit wordy at times. It's the story of a well to do Jewish family in Buffalo, NY. The story begins in the late 1920s and ends in 1950. The characters (5 grown children - 4 women and 1 man) have just lost their mother to cancer, then the eldest leaves without provocation or explanation.

The story is told from everyone's perspective except one (unfortunately the character who'd probably have been the most interesting.) They all want to be part of life, but they never seem to be able to figure out how to just be, let alone be part of their family. The characters just didn't grow or change enough for me. So although I enjoyed the story, at the end felt kind of 'meh.'

Amy says

The first desire is for the mother, the second to disappear.

This was not my favorite read. I liked it better in the first half. I just don't care for (spoiler alert) books where nothing happens to transform the characters, and nobody grows by the end. Its just a sad, broken remnant of a family by the books end, and I think my reading time might have been better well spent. I did enjoy her writing and the initial concept and premise.

Now reading the Book of Jonah, the Story Hour, and How's Your Faith.

Lisa says

This novel began as a 3-star quality, solid character development but slow plot. It's a 21-year history of the most dysfunctional family on earth. But with all the secrets I'd think the plot would go somewhere. Lillian didn't seem like a necessary character except what she represented to Abe but it wasn't fleshed out. I dropped my rating to 2 stars because the ending was unsatisfying. The drama wasn't explained and the characters' actions were too ridiculous to believe.

Saleh MoonWalker says

Onvan : The First Desire - Nevisande : Nancy Reisman - ISBN : 1400077990 - ISBN13 : 9781400077991 - Dar 320 Safhe - Saal e Chap : 2004

Misha says

BookList: The bonds of family are like spiderwebs: deceptively delicate but tough beyond all reason should we try to break them. When Goldie Cohen, 33, goes missing following her mother's death and her father's hasty attachment to the town vixen, the family begins to unravel. Spanning 21 years, from the late 1920s to the '50s, Reisman's debut novel provides a glimpse into a splintered Jewish Russian immigrant family in upstate New York. Told from the alternating perspectives of the various Cohen children, the story reveals the ways in which Goldie's memory lingers and lays bare the distances deepening between the rest of the family members. Sadie, a young wife and mother, takes on the family burden once managed by her older sister: her reckless brother, imbalanced sister, and recalcitrant father, whose expectations and silences engulf them all. Reminiscent of Julia Glass' *Three Junes* (2002), the novel portrays a subtle dance of interdependence and disconnection. In luminous prose that showcases a cacophony of voices, Reisman exposes how our families can be "the most familiar of strangers." -- MishaStone (BookList, 09-01-2004, p64)

Melanie says

I enjoyed this story of the Cohen family. I have a feeling a lot of people would think this book is boring.

There aren't any climatic scenes in the story, but I don't mind a "quiet" story once in a while if I like the way the author writes. I felt like I got to know the characters pretty well. The ending wasn't "tied up in a neat bow" but that was ok. Sometimes it's ok to imagine where I think the story would go.

Kristi says

omg the LONGEST Short STORY Ever.

Not a time period i like at all.

What else can i say? I don't see this as a re read.

I actually couldn't tell you what the first desire was? maybe to be close to family or maybe to be away from them. There was no reality busting in on them, no scrubbing of toilets or regular old tuesday bowling night to ground them, the mystery was no mystery and no one really cared about anyone anyway. ugg, nothing was beautiful, not one single moment was untouched by ugly, not the falls, not the orange sunset, not the garden, not the lemonade, a few times i thought the chocolates and pastries might be pretty but not so much.

and the ending, well a bit unexpected but don't we all wish we could have done that and walked away, but then to where?

a short story yes. a novel no.

Michele says

It took me a while to get into this book. it is essentially character-driven, everything revolving around the siblings in the family, and the mistress of the father. I thought it was odd to include Lillian, but not all of the siblings. These books that tell the story from the perspective of different people always seem slightly unsatisfying to me in that they don't tell the story from all of the people in the same situation and often seem to include some random other person. Ultimately, I found the ending unsatisfying, although I am not sure what I expected. In addition, the book never tied the title into the novel itself. There was one passing reference to what the *second* desire was (although I can't remember what that was now) but no mention of the first desire at all. And it wasn't clear at all from the book. It also wasn't as though there was a different "first desire" for each sibling and that you would know that from reading each character's passages.

Kirsten says

One of the best books I've read in a long time. It is set locally -- in Buffalo -- and it really looks into each of the characters, all part of Jewish family in the early 1900's. I found the frustration that each character lived with very believable and sympathized with their feelings of being trapped. It seemed only Goldie could break free, and maybe in her own way, due to her "simplicity" Celia was able to be more free. But Jo, Sadie, and Irving have their limitations and frustrations. Somehow though I think Sadie is the happiest of them. Anyway, I recommend this book for those who are into character-driven stories and probing emotions.

Cheryl Gatling says

The Cohens are a Jewish family in Buffalo. Father Abe owns a jewelry store. His wife is dead. He has five grown children. One day daughter Goldie goes out to do some shopping and never comes home. The book begins as a mystery. What has happened to Goldie? Is she dead? Will she come back? How will her absence change the family members she left behind? But years go by, and the story becomes about more than Goldie's absence. It's about the whole more or less dysfunctional family. Sadie, the respectable daughter, has married a dentist. Celia has something mentally wrong with her. She wanders off, and is afraid to bathe. Jo is a closeted lesbian. She begins briefly to blossom when she falls in love with a co-worker, but then grows bitter when that woman marries, and Jo gets stuck with the care of Celia. Irving, the only son, likes gambling and drinking and the wrong kind of women. The Cohens irritate each other. They disappoint each other. They misunderstand each other. But... there they are. What is the first desire? The book seems to answer that question. It says that for young Goldie, the first desire was to be with her mother. But it is not that simple. There is enough desire in the novel to fill a term paper, if not a master's thesis. All the Cohens want things. Sometimes they get them. Sometimes they don't. They question themselves, what do they want? They question each other. Lillian, Abe's long-time mistress, wanted to marry him, and have the nice house. Irving wanted to be a smooth man of the world with an Anglo name like Thomas. It seems that only Goldie got what she wanted, which was away. The narrative takes us into the head of each character in turn, except for Abe and Celia. It makes sense to the story that we never experience Abe's thoughts, because he is a remote and reserved kind of character, although his expectations cast a strong shadow over everyone else. I was disappointed that we never got to hear from Celia, though, because she is such an interesting character. What exactly is wrong with Celia? Mental illness? Personality disorder? I would have liked to know what she was thinking. In general, all of these characters seemed to think about life just a bit too much. They experience the unreality of their surroundings. They feel that they are splintering, or fading, or fizzing. Their sense of self is shifting or tenuous. I found this hard to buy. I can accept that some people of artistic temperament experience life this way, and that "normal" people have such feelings at rare moments of great stress. But every member of a family? I think most people accept life at face value most of the time. I thought these passages, although beautifully written, were overwritten. What interested me was the changes wrought by the years on one family.

Jan says

A beautifully written family novel taking place in the 1930's and '40's. If you enjoy Alice McDermott, Anne Tyler or Sue Miller this hidden gem is for you.
