



# Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree

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Emma-Jean Lazarus is a lovable oddball who thinks she can use logic to solve the messy everyday problems of her seventh-grade peers. It's easy: she just follows the example of her late father, a brilliant mathematician. Of course, the more Emma-Jean gets involved, the messier her own life gets. Suddenly she's no longer the person standing on the outside of all social interactions. But perhaps that's a good thing?

If you took *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* and *Ida B . . . and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World* and put them in a middle-grade blender, you would have the book *Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree*. Quirky, honest, and written by first-time author Lauren Tarshis, this is a tender story about what happens when a girl who has long stood in the social shadows gets a taste of what it's like to connect with kids her own age.

## Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree Details

Date : Published March 1st 2007 by Dial Books (first published January 1st 2007)

ISBN : 9780803731646

Author : Lauren Tarshis

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## From Reader Review Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree for online ebook

### Brandi says

I don't know exactly what it is about this book, but I really didn't get it. I thought that Tarshis owed us a bit more explanation as to why Emma Jean is the way she is. The fact that her father was a mathematician does not justify the way she speaks and the way she approaches other people. I understand that she is quirky and that's all good and everything, but what I don't understand why she doesn't understand common sense. When Emma Jean saw Colleen in the window, it never crossed her mind that Colleen was ignoring her. If she wasn't coming to the door, then, obviously, she must be dying. If Emma Jean was supposed to have autism, I would have preferred if Tarshis would have said it in the beginning. Instead, I spent the book trying to figure out what was exactly wrong with her.

On a completely different note, I don't understand the bimbo attitudes of Colleen's friends. Colleen is supposedly the nicest girl in school but her friends don't seem to like Colleen because she's nice. It's almost as if they were her little "yes men" at the end of the book. And what is the deal with telling everyone they are gorgeous? Is that really the most important thing? Isn't it bad enough that girls are obsessed about their looks as it is? This book basically says telling someone they are gorgeous is the best compliment and a generally nice thing to do.

I don't know what I missed reading this book, but I really didn't enjoy it. Perhaps it was just the audio version. Maybe I'll try reading it again in a few months or something and see if my opinion has differed.

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### ashley says

I really liked this book because it helped me realize that just because someone is an oddball like Emma-Jean doesn't mean that they can't be a good friend to have. I have more friends now than I had before the book and they are awesome it is a really good book and I would recommend it to anyone that wants a book that they can feel like they're standing right there. I am currently reading the second book in the series Emma-Jean Lazarus fell in love. I love how the author really pulls you in and that there is two different views.

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### Heidi says

Grades 6-9  
Rebecca Caudill Nominee 2010  
Audiobook read by Mamie Gummer

Emma-Jean Lazarus, an unusual seventh grader grieving the loss of her brilliant father, learns about the subtleties of friendship, love, and solving problems. Tarshis accurately captures the various voices and conflicts of middle school. Readers will be able to feel the turmoil of the characters trying to gain acceptance with their peers while trying to discover their identity.

Because its exploration of bullying and acceptance, this novel would make an excellent read aloud or shared reading for middle school students. The audio book is engaging, even though the reader uses different voices

for the characters, including that of an Indian doctoral student who becomes Emma-Jean's love interest. According to a review on AudioFile.com, "Gummer has obviously inherited a facility for accents from her mother, Meryl Streep. She gives each character a subtly distinct voice while sustaining the detachment that is quintessential Emma-Jean."

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### **Kate says**

This story begins Emma Jean Lazarus opens a door. Literally, it's the door to the girls' bathroom at school, where she finds Colleen Pomerantz (a kind, sensitive girl and not one of the usual 7th grade criers) sobbing over a problem with a friend. Figuratively, it's the door we all open when we make the sometimes scary decision to reach out to another human being. This is a big deal for all of us, but especially for Emma Jean, who's one of those brilliant, wise-beyond-her-years kids who seems to watch everything from the sidelines. She reminds me a lot of Lisa Yee's Millicent Min, Girl Genius. Because Emma Jean is brilliant at math and logic, just like her father who died two years ago, she uses logic to find solutions to her classmates' problems, with results that are hilarious and heartwarming.

There's a lot to love about this book. If you're a writer, you should read it because it's a fantastic example of how to pull off changing points of view in third person narrative. If you spend any time in a middle school, you'll love it because the characters are so real. As a middle school English teacher, I recognized these kids. I've seen Emma Jean watching the other kids at lunch. I've comforted Colleen when one of her friends was mad at her. And I've seen them all in their specially picked outfits at that first middle school dance. Author Lauren Tarshis has nailed middle school to a tee; she even understands one of the great secrets of school hallways: that the custodians are the real heroes.

Emma Jean Lazarus goes out on a limb in this middle grade novel (and yes, she really does fall out of a tree). Her journey is one that manages to be funny and sad and uplifting and true, all at once. You'll love this book.

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### **Rebecca says**

I think the simple books are really the best, and the hardest to do well: Rules, Missing May, The First Part Last, The Hundred Dresses, Weetzie Bat. And Emma Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree. 7th grader Emma Jean is a most unusual character who takes everything at face value, and her almost-friend Colleen is a wonderfully recognizable character who worries about everything. When Emma Jean is finally brought out of her shell by Colleen's plight with bully Laura, her desire to anonymously solve all the problems of the 7th grade takes on an Amelie-like quality. Five stars -- Newbery whispers?

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

This book is utterly delightful, sweet, and very smart. Emma-Jean is an endearingly strange (strange = extraordinary, remarkable, singular) character. Colleen and the other middle school kids are also interesting, and I appreciate how the adult characters are more fleshed out than they are in some kids' books. Emma-Jean's bird was yet another appealing character.

It's an almost perfect little book. I do have a slight quibble with how neatly certain events got wrapped up at

the end, but I just love this book, and I fell in love with Emma-Jean.

I hope that there are more Emma-Jean books and this story would also make a wonderful movie if it was done right.

I've already brought the book back to the library, but I wanted to add that in the author's bio in the back inside cover of the book, she writes something about how we're all trying to communicate with one another and some of us have a more difficult time than others, and that message was part of what she was trying to convey in this book. She did a stellar job!

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## Vonnie says

audiobook

I needed a fun, light, and quick audio to listen to during my hectic schedule. I came across this middle school book and became interested in its title. This book was very enjoy and quite cute.

Emma-Jean was an interesting character. She was very intelligent and her manner of speaking showed that she was well educated for a seventh grader. Emma-Jean was also a social outcast because of her "weirdness." Though it does not explain what Emma-Jean has, it lead me to believe that the was autistic. Her obsession in doing things that are right, taking things very literal, not wanting to socialize, and how she reacted when one of the characters sobbed lead me to believe this. I really enjoyed listening to the things she said. She was observant and very wise. She was a very fun character.

Thoughts on performance: Mamie Gummer did a pretty good job in reading this book. She knew how to portray the characters very well. She was able to capture Emma-Jean's awkwardness and smartness, while at the same time she was able to portray the friend Colleen's dramatic character. Mamie Gummer kept me hooked to the story.

This was a great audio. Though the story was very simple, I loved it. I enjoyed the main character so much that I want to share this book with my students.

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## Melissa says

A sweet little book about an ultra-logical girl (and let's have a shout-out here for the mathematically minded girls in the house, or a representation of girls on the autism spectrum, as Emma-Jean seems to be). Thanks for the recommendation, Becca (who described this to me as a "nice book about nice people" and she was, as always, spot-on).

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## Jennifer says

5 Reasons why *Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree* is a strange book ( **strange** *adj* : extraordinary, remarkable, singular)

5. Emma-Jean dressed like Albert Einstein for Halloween.
  4. Colleen's pastel pink bedroom makes her feel like she's trapped in an old dog's ear.
  3. Poet Mary Oliver, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the Pittsburgh Steelers, all mentioned in the same book. Now how often does *that* happen?
  2. The book never tries to label Emma-Jean. She just is who she is.
  1. The ending hints to the possibility of another Emma-Jean book. God, I hope so.
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## Int'l librarian says

There's something about the pace of this story, and Tarshis' ability to reveal key moments of the plot, that make it absolutely charming. This story is also much more sophisticated than its simple concrete language and feel-good dynamic would make it seem at first.

Concrete language fits the story line perfectly. Emma-Jean almost certainly has some degree of Asperger's Syndrome. Some of her classmates make fun of her for it. Almost all the adults in the story see it as part of what makes her wonderful. And sure, she is wonderful. And almost too successful to be believed. But in a story like this, that's what I want for her.

Early on the story made me think of Encyclopedia Brown; the simple progression of problems and surprisingly logical if outlandish solutions. Tarshis recognizes as much, and weaves in references to Nancy Drew. The mystery and danger may not be the same, but the problem solving is impossible to ignore.

I'm not sure whether that's good or bad. I'm more certain that I don't like how all-knowing the janitor seems to be. And Colleen is over-the-top as an insecure nice girl in need of affirmation. But none of that is overly bothersome.

Like any good story about emotional disorders, there's a strong undercurrent of emotional tension. How will Emma-Jean handle irrational expressions of sadness, passion, and hope? I'm not sure that all her responses make psychoanalytical sense, but they feel right to me. And even better, she and Tarshis make me feel good.

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## Ani says

This book really celebrates the balance between individuality and finding your place among others, between solitude and letting other people into your life. The heroine is a bright young girl who doesn't fit in with her peers, yet doesn't lament this fact or even really let it bother her. She just watches and observes. Her approach to life (rational, logical), leads her to take on different solutions to her peers' problems. Emma-Jean is unique among children's books heroines- even those smart, independent girls like Anne Shirley. This story is no ugly duckling story that ends with Emma-Jean being prom queen, made over and the most popular girl in school. It has a much richer and more realistic storyline that is even more fulfilling.

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## Cheryl says

Loved it. At least four stars for the story, and the audio narrator should get at least a star just for her perfect voice, so fitting, so clear, so fluent. Read (and like!) Lisa Vegan's review for exactly what was so almost

perfect about it. I will definitely hunt down the next book and hope that there are more than 2.

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### **Deana says**

Emma-Jean is a funny and realistic narrator. This book has been touted as a "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time" for the reader set and I can certainly see the parallels. However Emma-Jean is never painted as autistic although it's quite possible that she's somewhere on the spectrum of diagnosis. Emma-Jean is an avid observer of her classmates, her mother and while she doesn't participate in the relationships around her she tries her best to make things work out the way that she feels they should. I loved seeing the world through her eyes.

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### **Tamara says**

As a juvie fiction novel, this one is a definite gem. It contains simple language and a simple story, but with wonderful details.

The voices of the two main characters ring true. Although their later-life labels may be obsessive compulsive and worrywart, their 7th grade selves are simply endearing. Emma Jean, who is direct and logical, doesn't quite get her overly emotional classmates, but when Colleen asks for help, Emma Jean comes to the rescue.

Though the same dilemmas of a reinvented family dynamic, making friends, dealing with bullies, and trying to fit in all exist here, they are much more subtle and pleasant to read about. Plus, this was an extremely fast read. On a 12-hour car ride, all three passengers were able to start and finish this one!

Favorite quote:

"Crying was not a logical way to express one's opposition to the seventh-grade science curriculum."

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### **Lisa says**

Emma-Jean, is an intriguing character. She is intriguing the way Spock or Data--both of Star Trek incarnations--are. But that's the problem. As interesting and amusing as she is, this isn't a science fiction story. She isn't an alien or an android. She isn't even a highly functioning autistic child. No mention of Asperger's. Since she is none of the above, the entire story cannot support the initial premise. That she should be so peacefully excluded, and so content, during her entire school career doesn't work. The book is also schizophrenic in nature. I am not saying that dual narrative is a poor technique. It can be done well. But there seems no choice about the dual narrative, just a kind of literary happenstance. Who is the protagonist here? Emma-Jean or Colleen? First-time novelist Lauren Tarshis shows potential here she can pull at the heartstrings she can create mostly believable conflict, but she still has some work to do.

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