



Parachutes & Kisses

Erica Jong

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Married (again) and divorced (again), Isadora Wing is a single parent with an adorable daughter, an irritating ex-husband, and a startling assortment of suitors: an unorthodox rabbi, a poetic disc jockey, the son of a famous sex therapist, and WASPily handsomest of all: Berkeley Sproul III. Isadora and Berkeley meet at a health club, and he's fourteen years her junior. Of course their affair is tortuous and sexy, but is it love? Or does the stud just want a free trip to Venice, compliments of a famous author? Either way, Erica Jong wrote this romance with "a mixture of eloquence and savage wit as good as anything she has ever written," said **The Wall Street Journal**.

Parachutes & Kisses Details

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John says

Parachutes and Kisses is the third in a series of related "autobiographical novels" by Erica Jong. As with the others, *P&K* is filled with wonderful insights and many fine sentences. I like reading Erica Jong a lot.

My favorite sequence is when the heroine, Isadora Wing, is in the Soviet Union (before its fall, when it was still the big bad bear) to research the background of her late grandfather, who left Odessa as a teenager.

But the pleasure of this novel is offset for me, at least a little bit, by a character toward its end, identified here as "Bean." (He shows up in a slightly different guise in the next in this series of novels, *Any Woman's Blues*.) To be simple and blunt, Bean is an asshole. Since I know what he's capable of (in the next book) his appearance is unwelcome, even if he is based on a real guy, and even if the events described probably happened, more or less the way they're described.

It isn't *just* that this guy is an asshole, though. Gotta have some sort of opposition, or villain – *something* – or what's the point, right? So no, it isn't just that. And it isn't the graphic sex – I'm no prude. No, it's the way Erica/Isadora relates to this guy that really turns me off.

I think most of us, at some point in our lives, have known people who fall into a new relationship – and proceed to act like no one else gets it, that no one else has ever been in love the way *they* are in love. This is how Bean and Isadora relate. It isn't just that, though. Frankly, it's Jong's repeated use of the word *astound* that really irked me. "...They astounded themselves by fucking so madly and so often that they were too sore to sightsee [in Venice]. Once, twice, three times, four, five, and six times a day was not enough..." Earlier they astounded themselves by how well they "fit" together, and how well they get along. *Astounding*. I reached a point where I thought, If I read how *astounded* these idiots are one more time, I'm gonna throw this fucking book across the room!

Then again, maybe I'm just jealous. Don't we all want some demon lover to keep things interesting?

Tracimaster says

Many different reviews on here. The way I see it, if you didn't like it, it wasn't time for you to read it. It crossed your path too soon. If you loved it (like me), the timing was perfect. I think it was my favorite of the three.

Monica says

Erica Jong is one of my favorite authors, and of all her books this is by far the worst (or maybe I'm just not the right audience). Usually teeming with equal parts sex and introspection, this book was mostly about how women change after motherhood (boring) and about finding oneself again after heartbreak (blah).

Katie Fox says

"One must look, but one must also leap. One **MUST** go a-roving late into the night."

Jennifer says

Not **NEARLY** as entertaining as Fear of Flying or How to Save Your Own Life, which was disappointing. Isadora grows up, and its pretty boring and sad. I guess thats reality, though.

B says

Now that Jong has totally lost the plot politically by calling Bernie Sanders a "sexist asshole" for staying in the race (that's a deep level of analysis there, Jong!), I can finally be honest about what I thought of this book, which I abandoned about a third of the way in.

It was not a short and easy read, but not because it contained complicated prose and deep ideas, but because it was so incredibly **PAINFUL AND BORING**.

Observe, the slow, whiny literary murder of Isadora Wing!

Yeah, if you ever liked Isadora or thought of her as edgy and fun and someone who could convey anything of value to you **DO NOT** read this book.

She doesn't actually get murdered - that would mean that something actually happened. All I could see happening was Erica Jong whinging about her marriage breaking up and saying she desperately rooted some super boring blokes and whinging about Jonathan Fast, sorry, I mean *Josh Ace* before she crashed her car, something something, boring boring, **ZZZZZZZZ...**

This is Jong at her worst (I think, although I can't confirm this because I'm not going to bother reading any more of her work). I can't believe this book made it past the editors. It's like they said "oh, you're Erica Jong, you can just write anything. Do Isadora again, people love her!".

And so Jong just did her usual thing of (presumably) vomiting out what's been happening in her life and then changing the names. Except this time she didn't even add any sparkly fiction to it. Did she have a car called "QUIM"? Or was it just such a massively funny idea to have a car called "QUIM"? (Hint: it's really not **THAT** funny... It's like mild-polite-laughter-over-cocktail-frankfurter-and-cube-cheese-and-jatz-oh-is-that-the-time funny)

But I digress. Actually, you know what? I can't be bothered. I hated this book. Passionately. I liked FoF and to a lesser extent How To Save Your Own Life and Sappho's Leap (pretty zany but okay), so I felt obliged to not be harsh about it. I was a huge Jong fan after reading FoF. **YUGE**.

But she took everything interesting about Isadora Wing and put it through the fucking shredder. It would have been cool to see an exploration of Isadora as a mother to Molly (or whatever her fictionalised name is) but instead we're left with hundreds of pages of neurotic, privileged bullshit. No fucking thanks.

Bring back the thanksgiving day parade balloons. This book sucked. Zero stars.

Z says

I've always loved Erica Jong and have often said that reading her has felt like sharing notes with a sister, but *Parachutes and Kisses* didn't quite cut it for me. It dragged on far too long, and made *Isadora Wing* seem far less independent and likeable than the first two books in the series did. Though judging the book by the likeability of its protagonist may be unfair - it's never been *Isadora's* job to be something as plebeian as likeable, and Jong is very honest, sometimes embarrassingly so, about the weaknesses and failings of her alter ego. This is why *Fear of Flying* was so relatable - *Isadora* was imperfect, often scared, always hilarious. I'm not sure what the false note is in *Parachutes and Kisses*, but some such note has certainly been struck. She starts off missing her husband terribly (they are now separated), takes several lovers of varying ages, statuses, backgrounds, and then falls for a boy toy on whom Jong has certainly spent about 100 pages too many.

Still, 2 stars for the passages that resonated most with me... I think of Bean saying, "There's nothing at all wrong with us... sometimes perfection is harder to take than imperfection, and love is harder to take than heartbreak." And of course, Jong's emphatic sign-off, representative perhaps of *Isadora's* popularity among readers: "We may be monogamous in life, but all bets are off in dreams."

Laine says

I might not have finished this book if I did not get the flu and long periods of time to read it. I did not like it as much as the previous two. She is truly an intelligent and interesting writer. Once I got used to the abundance of c-words, I enjoyed the plot and the tangents.

April says

I've finally put this one to rest. It is too darn long with not much happening. Some parts of it I just loved but I can't seem to get through it no matter what I do.

Kathe says

Parts of this book are laugh-out-loud hilarious, and parts are absolutely maddening. It came out in 1984, sequel to the much-ballyhooed *Fear of Flying*, and our heroine, *Isadora Wing*, is clearly Jong's alter ego. She's recently separated from husband number three, a perpetual adolescent she's still pining for, and has a three-year-old daughter she purports to love dearly but who gets very lost in the shuffle. The shuffle of *Isadora's* sex life, that is - described in exhaustive (sometimes exhausting just to read) detail.

Jong is purportedly a seminal (you should pardon the expression) feminist, but it seems to me that our heroine here, despite all her wealth and beauty, is still waiting for men to define her life. I kept reading because... well, it was extremely entertaining, but I kept muttering to myself about how self-absorbed *Isadora* was and wondering how, even with all her fame and fortune, she's made such weird choices and then continues to bitch about the results.

Looking up the author just now, I see that she has a new novel, Fear of Dying, coming out in September...

Rose says

I read this book in 1985 when I was sixteen. My High School English teacher recommended it.

Melissa says

[

"He dove into her muff with great exuberance, parted it, found the white string that dangled chastely there and pulled her Tampax triumphantly out with his teeth"

. THAT ISN'T EVEN THE NASTY PART YET. He then proceeds to *ch*

Jennifer says

The main reason I'm not giving this book just one star is because I didn't completely loathe it, but I certainly did not like it very much. So perhaps I'd give it 1 1/2 stars.

Ms. Jong should've stopped writing about Isadora White Stollerman Wing Ace when readers only knew her as Isadora Wing in "Fear of Flying." The more I've read about Isadora the more love sick, desperate, needy, man-hungry, and all around annoying she became.

I think one of the major faults of "Parachutes and Kisses" is that the final book (I sincerely hope there will be NO MORE Isadora Wing novels) isn't narrated from Isadora's POV like "Flying" and "How to Save a Life" were. This narrator is repetitive (how many times do I have to read about Isadora's heartache over her latest ex-husband, how she uses men/sex to try and heal the wound, and how many deaths she had to deal with in one year?), likes to quote European or 18th/19th century lit WAY too much, and loves to talk about Isadora's trendy, fame, and money filled lifestyle now that she's a successful author. She schmoozes, she wines & dines, she has gratuitous sex...a lot, and she's somewhat neglectful of her daughter when it comes to her need of being satisfied, albeit, fulfilled by another man. The Postscript (from 2006) by the author says that this book was to be an ode to the younger man helping an older woman get through divorce. Well, if that was the point this book could've been cut in half and we could've stopped going through her merry-go-round of lovers to her finding Mr. Right Now. This was an issue of mine with "Life" was that Isadora was having so much sex and not finding fulfillment that it was one of her last lovers to help her get through her heartbreak and here we follow the same methodology when I'd hope at her age other things like her daughter would take precedent.

And don't get me started on the chapter about all the crappy nannies she settled with just because she couldn't deal with finding another one and deemed even the most unfit one "not that bad."

In the midst of all the name dropping, old-school literary references, fornication after fornication, wallowing in self-pity and "Jewish guilt", and unnecessary racial stereotypes like her reference to having to show off her money like ghetto Blacks I was disappointed in the final installment of the Isadora Wing series.

For me "Fear of Flying" definitely hit a nerve and made this character relatable. In "How to Save a Life" she was somewhat relatable but very whiny and sexually active as a way to attempt to get satisfaction and really jab at those she had failed relationships with (foray into same-sex trist was aimed at her mother) and the other ones with men were to get back at her husband at the time, Bennett. This time around she used sex to attempt to heal herself because she "needs" a man in her life. Not to say that that's a bad thing but when you have a child to care for and other responsibilities perhaps a regular lay doesn't have to be at the forefront of one's mind. By this book she is no longer that relatable woman, but a highly irritating one.

After reading two mediocre books about Isadora, I'm ready to go back to the start where I fell in like with her in the first place.

Lilia says

My all time favorite character written by my all time favorite author. What's not to love? If you haven't read "Fear of Flying" yet don't even go here.

Chris says

I was in high school when Fear of Flying came out and reading it was a bit of a rite of passage. Most of us, lacking any actual sex scenes of our own, read about Isadora's without any informed idea as to their accuracy. I read Parachutes & Kisses in my mid-twenties, and it has a special spot in my memory for how accurate it was. Not about sex. To be honest, I don't remember what I thought of the sex in the book at all. However, in my mid-twenties I gave birth to my daughter by C-section, right at the height of everyone extolling the glories of natural childbirth. Stories, both true and fictional, about natural childbirth were, pardon the pun, popping out all over the place. There was a judgmental attitude towards women who ended up taking painkillers at all during labour and who ended up having C-sections. It was easy to feel disappointed, cheated even, that I ended up having a C-section after 50 hours of labour. Implicitly, I had failed and my body had failed me. About six months later I picked up Parachutes & Kisses and could tell early on in the story that at some point a description of Isadora giving birth was in store. I braced myself for the inevitable natural childbirth scene, the "summitting Everest without oxygen while listening to Beethoven's 9th symphony" combination of accomplishment and awe that such descriptions were loaded with at the time. Instead, I felt so grateful when Isadora, after a long labour, had a C-section in a passage written by someone who has either had one, or talked to someone who has. Jong got it right, down to how much you feel during one and describing how much longer it takes to get all the various layers stitched up than it does to get the baby out. As an author, Jong could have shaped Isadora's story any way she chose, and she chose, for whatever reason, to go against the trend of the time by including a C-section. So, although not a particularly memorable book otherwise, this novel gets an extra star from me for the much-needed-at-the-time sense of validation those few pages gave me.
