



The Loved Ones

Mary-Beth Hughes

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From the outside in, the Devlin family lead almost-perfect lives. Dashing father, Nick, is a successful businessman long married to sweetheart Jean, who upholds the family home and throws dinner parties while daughter Lily attends Catholic school and is disciplined into modesty by the nuns. Under the surface, however, the Devlins are silently broken by the death of their little boy. As Nick's older brother, a man driven by callous and rapacious urges, inducts Nick into the cut-throat world of cosmetics the Devlin family are further fragmented by betrayals, and victims of the cruelest kind of hurt.

In *The Loved Ones* Hughes takes her gimlet eye deep into the secret places between men and women to give an incisive portrayal of one family's struggle to stay together against stacked odds of deception, adultery, and loss. Years in the making, this is Hughes' astonishing and compulsively readable break out, a sweepingly cinematic novel of relationships defined by an era of glamour and decadence.

The Loved Ones Details

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Author : Mary-Beth Hughes

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From Reader Review The Loved Ones for online ebook

Cheryl D says

If I wanted to read or deal with such a cast of deplorable people I would have walked myself several doors down and talked to my loser, stoner, and oh-so-sleezy neighbors. I felt like I was on acid (or wanted to be) the entire time I was reading. Confusing, boring and who cares? were just a few of my thoughts as I slogged through this book hoping it would somehow crawl out of its rabbit hole and become a real story instead of a *Alice in Wonderland* in 70's boots. The one redeeming feature... the author could put together a decent sentence but too bad they made no sense. A real disappointment that probably should have earned one star but because I managed to finish it merited two.

Kathy says

The Loved Ones by **Mary-Beth Hughes** is a poignant novel about a family trying to cope with the death of their child.

The emotional divide between the members of the Devlin family is soon compounded by an unwanted move from their beloved family home in the US to London. Nick is coerced into taking a position in a cosmetic company by his manipulative brother Lionel and after his relocation to the UK, Nick tries to bury his grief with illegal drugs and extramarital sex. Jean is less than thrilled with the move but she eventually capitulates and she, along with their daughter Lily, join Nick in London where she continues to distance herself from both Nick and Lily. Poor Lily was already struggling to fit in at her old school in the US and she does not find it easier to make friends or find her niche after the move.

Numerous characters are introduced early in the novel and it is virtually impossible to keep up with them or their relationships with the key players. With the exception of Lily, the main characters are difficult to like and despite feeling compassion for their loss, they are rather unsympathetic.

The Loved Ones is a somewhat difficult novel to follow. The narrative is rather disjointed and the shifts between past and present are not clearly marked. Despite the descriptive passages, there is a vagueness to the overall storyline that makes it impossible to connect with neither the plot nor the characters. A lack of quotation marks adds to the confusion and when the dialog lasts longer than a few sentences, it is hard to keep up with which character is speaking.

There is no doubt that **Mary-Beth Hughes** is a gifted storyteller. *The Loved Ones* is a well written novel with a decent storyline that is unfortunately buried in the midst of the rambling, confusing narrative. The story's conclusion is quite unexpected and although a little abrupt and somewhat ambiguous, it is satisfying.

Ginni says

(I received this book for free from a Goodreads giveaway.)

The language of this book is impeccable--original, lovely, vivid, precise. I get the sense, too, that the author fully developed every character, that she made all of the parts as real as fiction can be. It's in the joining of all the parts that something is missing. I felt, reading it, like I was looking at a painting where every part was

exquisitely rendered, but the artist didn't understand rules of composition. Every scene is polished to perfection, but the plot just gets lost.

I will re-read this down the road and see if some of the subtleties of the narrative just went over my head. And I'll certainly read anything else by this author if given the chance. Still, it's a shame that this book wasn't as engaging as it deserved to be.

Anne Washington says

The only thing I liked about this book is I finally finished it.

Karen M says

The writing was descriptively lovely. The characters were complex and colorful. There were so many strong elements in the story but I'm having difficulty in my mind explaining why I enjoyed reading this book. I did enjoy the book but I couldn't explain to anyone what this book is about except to say it's about a complex family and the ending is very abrupt and doesn't seem to answer any of the questions that I had as I read it.

I'm not a reader who needs a story tied up nicely with a "and then they lived happily ever after" but I had so many confusing thoughts about what was going on between some of the characters that the book felt unfinished to me, as a reader. I felt left out. That's the best way I can explain how I felt when I finished the book. Lots of secrets not to be revealed by the characters. No answers or explanations were to be had.

I won this book in a First Reads giveaway.

Elaine Tucker says

I read the whole book, but did not like it. The story seemed to jump around a lot making it a difficult read.

Catherine Woodman says

This book got wonderful reviews, which is what led me to read it, but I have to admit that I really did not like it. Not at all. Not one person in the book could I sympathize with or care very much about.

The story chronicles the dysfunctional Devlin family, both before but mostly after their son dies. Speaking as a woman who had a brother die when she was ten, the effect of a death in childhood reverberates across the lives of all those involved, but it doesn't necessarily go this poorly. It's a cold almost humorless book, firing shots of dysfunction, addiction, and poor mental and physical health with absolutely no intervening commentary. It is well written but the aloofness of the tone made it hard for me to really reflect on the content, and I learned nothing from reading it. Which is not to say that I always have to learn something, but it is nice when that can happen, and disappointing when it doesn't.

Cynthia Archer says

Wow. I just finished reading this title, and I would give it 3.5 stars if possible just because of the luminous writing. It was the best part of the book. The plot and the characters were less inspiring. Early on, I found the story compelling and fascinating. As the book progressed, I began to feel more and more unbalanced by the declining spiral of each of the character's lives. There wasn't one that I was still liking by the end. The time period may have much to do with their self focused attitudes. The 60's were a time for extravagant indulgence and experimentation with sex and drugs. The author plays this out very well through her choices in story telling. The gradual implosion of the this family's lives became for me, both a distraction as well as a magnet. I had to continue reading and give the author credit for creating that draw. Yet, by the end, I was exhausted and confused. The book held possibility, but I didn't fully appreciate or enjoy the direction or ending of this story.

If you are a fan of books with depressing characters, this might be a perfect read for you. Don't expect a lesson or moral at the end, or any real growth in the characters' lives. It is pretty bleak. I really appreciate the author's use of language, and I did like the book. I just didn't love it.

My thanks to the publisher and NetGalley for the chance to read and review this title.

Linda says

I received this book for free through Goodread's First Reads in exchange for an honest review. Thank you for giving me a chance to read the book.

I thought the story sounded interesting, and I it started out interesting, but the writing is very confusing - the author skipping from one character to another, and I feel as if its almost dream like - very bizarre and disappointing. There are brief moments (pages) where the story starts to grab my attention and pull me into the story - and then the author abruptly changes the point of view to another character and then I'm bored and trying to find something interesting.

I am sad to say that I had to force myself to finish the book - which was almost painfully boring at times. I will not be looking for another book to read from this author.

Ann says

This was a disappointing read. I had high hopes when I read the summary about a family dealing with death. It was very confusing and hard to keep track of the various characters.

Barbara Rhine says

Three stars is supposed to mean I liked this book. So did I?

It's easier to begin with the things I didn't care for:

The plot confused me. This caused a lot of work, paging back and forth, By the end I still didn't know exactly what terrible deeds had been done off stage to such devastating impact on a grieving wife and a

daughter just coming of age. I am not sure why the author had to do this to her readers.

The book is about a decadence that did not appeal, and none of the characters offered any healthy perspective on the unhappy goings-on. I gained little understanding of why such conduct would even be engaged in, let alone tolerated by others close by. Instead I was totally fed up with the adults from the getgo, as soon as I figured out even a bit of what was happening.

And yet? "the loved ones" is about a family reeling from a child's death from cancer, and when I looked for insight there, I found it.

The tragedy magnifies in insidious fashion all the faults and limitations caused by class (too upper), privilege (too much) and ignorance (too unclear on any concept). And the damage done to the living healthy child is incalculable.

I am still thinking about this novel, three days after I finished it. Since one of fiction's purposes is to gnaw at us with detailed information about how this human life of our species actually manifests, I have to admit I respect this work. Even if I can't press "Like" as if we were Facebook.

Elyse Walters says

The luminous language and landscape imagery is exquisite.

"The cotton sky and gray lines of sea and punks and cattails poking out of the cracked shoreline, all the swirling tides frozen. Beautiful most of all on the quietest days, like this one, and she allowed herself a brief glance toward the ocean, when she heard the screech. The school bus spun sideways in slow motion, as through drawing a wide arc in the snow with its headlights until it bumped into the parapet and stopped just the hundred-plus feet ahead of her.".....

This is a complex family drama.

How do husbands and wives go on living together, after the death of a child? How do the other children adjust?

Nick and Jean Devlin struggle --but stay married against the odds loss, adultery, deception, betrayal, and secrets.

We watch their daughter Lily grow up --attending Catholic school. People are predicting her adulthood. Poor girl needs to find her way.

Everyone in the family seems to have disconnected emotionally from one another --(each finding their way - away from each other -and ways back)

As the reader, (more observer at times), I felt the the pull-of-passion with this family(understanding of the dysfunction) --

There is a reason Nick and Jean stay together. I didn't think it was only because of their other child 'Lily'. I think the author has an astute grasp of the indomitable spirit of emotional integrity and unflinching love.

Katie Robinson says

I find it hard to believe that the cast of people could have made it in to adult hood... The book is written strangely, it's confusing, boring, and very negative.

nikkia neil says

This book was like one long acid trip. Very confusing, everyone is daydreaming about past events and you don't know if what happens is in the present or the past.

Laine Cunningham says

The Loved Ones by Mary-Beth Hughes

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Now, I'm all for a book that asks a bit more of readers. I'm up for a challenge when entering a fictional world. I love to interact with different voices that trust me to be intelligent, and to care enough about the time I'm spending with a book to pay attention. Deep attention. To become engaged with individual characters as if they were my friends, or people I'd love to know or know about.

This book seems to be reaching for that but doesn't strike a good balance. It overreaches and in the process, turns into a confusing mess. It flips around quickly between characters remembered and "on stage," so to speak, and characters that aren't important to the narrative moment are intrusive rather than rendered seamlessly into the narrative.

It was like having someone tap you on the shoulder repeatedly while reading to ask you unrelated and irritatingly pointless questions. But since the interruptions arise from the text itself, you can't ignore the tapping.

I couldn't get far into this book before putting it down. I was very disappointed because the concept is exactly the kind of idea I love to read about. Here, though, the voice is too jumbled to follow. A little guidance from the author would have been appreciated.

I received an ARC from the publisher so I could write this review.

DNF: No star rating available.

If you like intelligent narratives and arresting plots, check out *The Family Made of Dust: A Novel of Loss and Rebirth in the Australian Outback*.
