



The Children's Hour

Marcia Willett

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In their comfortable old family home overlooking the sea, two sisters, Nest and Mina, live in solitude with memories of a once-idyllic childhood, and of the enchanted "children's hour" when their mother would regale them with tales of fantasy and delight. But the make-believe world of the story spinner didn't protect them from the reality of a shocking family tragedy best forgotten.

But when their estranged sister Georgie comes to stay, she brings unwelcome memories of her own, and long-buried secrets yet to be revealed. Now three sisters will engage in the most intimate children's hour of all-the story of their own lives, of a first love never-forgotten, of a passion that tore them apart, of a death that still casts its shadow of guilt and recrimination. And the truth of a fateful night that shattered their past, and still holds the power to define their future...

The Children's Hour Details

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From Reader Review The Children's Hour for online ebook

Sarah Sammis says

I tried reading The Children's Hour for a Bookcrossing booking because it came so highly recommended and because the blurb on the back of the book sounded interesting: "...But when their sister Georgie, now somewhat frail and forgetful, comes to stay at Ottercombe, memories of their past start to revisit them. As a child, Georgie claimed to know all their secrets — secrets that she now wants to share..."

If there were any secrets worth sharing, I didn't last long enough in the book to find out what the secrets were. I made it to page 112 of 442 and each new page became more and more of a chore to read. I seem to be the only person who hasn't enjoyed this book but I am often a contrarian reader. Given the overpowering domesticity to this book, I think this is the closest I've gotten to an "Aga Saga" and I hope it's my last.

I don't like stories where the characters do nothing but sit around and talk about their feelings and that was all the characters did in the quarter of the book that I read. I also don't particularly like weird sounding nicknames that aren't explained. Weird character names are harder to remember and are annoying. So having a character nicknamed "Nest" didn't help my souring view of The Children's Hour.

I did skip ahead to read the last three chapters, a trick I often do when I'm feeling doubtful about my interest in finishing a book. The last three chapters are just as schmaltzy and upbeat as the first three chapters are. In other words, there is no change and no sign of progress. The characters worry about stuff, reminisce about stuff, have secret stuff revealed (apparently) and have good stuff come about in a nice tidy way. Whoopee.

Aimee Short says

Wonderfully written as always. A nice feel good story with a few twists and turns. An all around great book

Shirley J says

I didn't take to this book right away. Some British terms weren't familiar, the story switches from the present back in time through memories and I just wasn't sure where the story was going. It was annoying enough to give up on ... like some I have.

One of my favorite quotes from the book, which is repeated several times, "Everyone has a right to their own history."

There is a show of strong loyalty and unconditional support among the siblings and extended family, especially as old family secrets are revealed. There is a lot of effort to keep things hush-hush, and a lot of fretting and hand-wringing about who will tell first which gets tedious. Reminded me of Maeve Binchy's books, just not quite at the same level.

Brandie says

I did not like this book here or there.

I did not like this book anywhere.

So many secrets. So many things that "circled back" but it felt forced.

It felt fake and sugar coated and frankly, it just bored me.

I picked it up and read because I confused it with another book of the almost same name.

And ugh. I did not like this one bit.

Sorry Willett. I'm sure you are a lovely person and we can have tea together, but your book was just not for me.

Tracy says

It's not too bad a story at all. I nearly dumped it half way through as I thought it a tad boring but I persevered and it finished up quite ok

Shelley says

Oh my gosh, this was probably one of the worst books I've ever read. To think that this author has 13+ other books she's written; I wonder if they are as bad as this one was. This was one of those books that I could skip over paragraphs, especially when she gave paragraphs and paragraphs and even one time 2-1/2 pages describing about what the dogs were doing - ahhh! Who cares! What's up with the main character, Mina's "po-po-po of sighing breath" and to boot, quite a number of times throughout the story. Was there really there a need for such silliness? Who does that? Do yourself a favor, don't bother reading this stupid book, better yet, recycle it, it's in a better place there.

Neb says

Charming story about dealing with love, loss and family. Sort of "Rosamund Pilcher light". Brave use of present tense for the flashback scenes of wartime England, but it works. Believable characters, nice character development arcs, satisfying resolutions without being overly saccharine. I would definitely read more by this author. I find this type of story to be good "summer reading".

Cardmaker says

I'll start by saying that I'm not overly fond of books written by authors from across the pond. Even with that less than glowing start, I still gave the book three stars because I did like the story in this one.

I liked the way the author moved us back and forth from wartime England to (almost) the present time. I found there to be a few too many characters at the start of the book for me to keep straight in my head so I quickly made up a family tree and stuck it in the front of the book. After several chapters, I hardly had to refer to it but it was quite a help at the start.

The characters were believable as were the things that happened. This means a lot to me when reading. I did not like the over-descriptive places where the author seemed to get lost in her own mind and go on and on and ON describing one place or another. I have to say I'm glad that didn't happen often.

Now, a couple of things that I did not like. The main one was a so-called habit of Mina, one of the main characters. The author describes her habit as being done when she was nervous or upset. She would say "po, po, po" while making a puffing sound. She did this several times throughout the book and every time it just irked me. In my opinion, it did nothing for the story and was just plain stupid.

The other thing I don't like is the use of English (British?) words that are not familiar on this side of the ocean. I suppose the same thing could be said by British readers of American books but maybe not. I'm talking of things like "a willow trug", "familiar lands dislimning", "her navy tartan trews", "punters", etc.

I'll still recommend this book because of the good story. I'm going to try to find out what all these things mean and write them in the front of the book for the next readers. :)

Sue says

Mina (Wilhemina) and her sister Nest (Ernestina) are elderly sisters living in the family home. Nest had been injured in a car accident and is wheelchair bound. Their older sister Georgie comes to spend a couple weeks with them in advance of space being available at a nursing home. Georgie suffers from some sort of dementia and Mina and Nest are concerned about the visit, fearing it will bring up long buried family secrets. Will the visit be the struggle they fear?

This is the third book of hers that I've read and they all fall under the heading of cozy family story. Willett takes some time in this one to set things up and effectively goes back and forth between past memories (shared as present events) and present. These are people that as a reader you'd like to meet and spend time with, of only that were possible.

Kerry Hennigan says

The Children's Hour is the story of three elderly sisters who are brought together in their declining years by family members while the eldest sister is waiting for admission to a nursing home. Georgie is physically frail and increasingly forgetful, but her temporary return to the family home where they all grew up and where her sisters Mina and Nest still live, dredges up all sorts of memories and family secrets.

Marcia Willett has written some charming novels. However, in this instance, after luring her readers into investing so much interest and empathy in her characters, she delivers an ending which fails to satisfy. Sadly it prevents *The Children's Hour* from being a 'keeper'.

DubaiReader says

Old folk reminiscing.

Marcia Willett started writing at the age of fifty and has since written 20 novels. It is not surprising then, that this book was peopled with old folk, all churning up distant memories. I listened to the Audible version, read by June Barry, who is also getting on in years, and by the end I could feel my hair greying. Admittedly, there are some young folk in the narrative and flashbacks to when those whose memories we shared, were young, but overall, it was if I'd walked into a nursing home.

The language was also 'of an age', people spoke on telephones rather than 'phones, for example. And I struggled with the lengthy descriptions and unnecessary naming of cultivated garden flowers.

There was a cast of thousands and I had to draw up a family tree in the early stages of the book as it is impossible to refer back, when listening to an audiobook.

The oldest generation were the children of the title, five girls and one boy, who passed much of their childhood in a large house in Ottocombe, with their mother, an avid reader of stories. As they grew and matured there were various love stories and tragedies, misunderstandings and secrets. Much is made of these secrets, which are gradually revealed over the course of the book. The next generation grows, all cousins and spouses, with more problems to overcome - and that's about it.

It helped pass the time as I sewed into the night on my daughter's wedding dress but I shan't be in a hurry to purchase further books by this author.

Orion says

What a cute book with its adorable cover (in the French edition) ! This is the kind of book that perfectly suits after a harsh time. It is warm and cosy as a cup of tea during a rainy day.

I particularly liked the relationship between Mina and Nest.

Plus the author fully controlled the alternation between their past, written in present tense, and present time, written in past tense. What an enjoyable exercise !

However I did not put five stars because I found Lyddie's story kind of annoying.

The plot twist was a bit unexpected but felt somehow like a magical resolution.

Well, after uni exams, I greatly appreciated it !

Clarice says

Before I begin, I should point out that I have read the 2007 German paperback edition of Willett's 'The Children's Hour', titled 'Das Spiel der Wellen'.

The book turned up in my kitchen after it was cleared out by one of my neighbours. He left it with me, since

I am the only German speaker in the neighbourhood.

I was not overly keen to start reading *The Children's Hour*, and so the book lingered together with the other titles he dropped off that day on my kitchen shelf. I picked it up six months ago, finished other books in-between and eventually completed it last Thursday. The time it's taken me to get through this novel (333 pages), suggests that this was a less than gripping read.

The story takes place in the British countryside in the late 1990s / early 2000s but covers a period of roughly 65 years from the late 1930s onwards. At the centre of the novel are sisters Mina and Nest, who share the family home in Ottercombe. A visit by their older sister Georgia, who suffers from dementia, not only prompts Mina and Nest to reminisce about the past, but also to confront deeply buried family secrets and to deal with a host of issues affecting them and their niece Lyddie.

Considering the overall length of the book, the vast number of characters and the time span covered, Willett attempts to cram an awful lot into a rather tight space. The characters and issues she explores (dementia, disability, infidelity and adoption) remain by and large on the surface. As a result of the constant flashbacks the story lacks an overarching plot line, which would have provided Willett's narrative with a sense of direction. The incorporation of surprising twists and turns right at the end felt - like other parts of the book - contrived, rushed and engineered.

Willett is often compared to author Rosamunde Pilcher. Never having read anything by Pilcher, *The Children's Hour* nevertheless reminded me of the ubiquitous Pilcher TV adaptations on German TV. Set against the backdrop of picturesque English countryside and populated with bland characters, Willett's book appears to be as formulaic as the Pilcher adaptations. My copy will be handed in at the nearest charity shop. One to be missed.

Christine says

Not a particularly challenging book but an easy read .

Tony says

This book was OK. The story is quite interesting but it was spoilt by the painfully slow build up. The author was obviously trying slowly to develop the characters but it began to become annoying with the constant references and descriptions of dogs, going for walks and cups of tea. I liked the switching between the past and present and I was keen to know what all the 'secrets' were. It was almost like a grown up version of an Enid Blyton book!
