



Mothers and Daughters

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A rich and luminous novel about three generations of women in one family: the love they share, the dreams they refuse to surrender, and the secrets they hold

Samantha is lost in the joys of new motherhood—the softness of her eight-month-old daughter's skin, the lovely weight of her child in her arms—but in trading her artistic dreams to care for her child, Sam worries she's lost something of herself. And she is still mourning another loss: her mother, Iris, died just one year ago.

When a box of Iris's belongings arrives on Sam's doorstep, she discovers links to pieces of her family history but is puzzled by much of the information the box contains. She learns that her grandmother Violet left New York City as an eleven-year-old girl, traveling by herself to the Midwest in search of a better life. But what was Violet's real reason for leaving? And how could she have made that trip alone at such a tender age?

In confronting secrets from her family's past, Sam comes to terms with deep secrets from her own. Moving back and forth in time between the stories of Sam, Violet, and Iris, *Mothers and Daughters* is the spellbinding tale of three remarkable women connected across a century by the complex wonder of motherhood.

Mothers and Daughters Details

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From Reader Review Mothers and Daughters for online ebook

Staci says

First thoughts after finishing this book: You think because you're family that you know everything about each other, but the truth is you really don't.

What I liked about the book:

The characters and how the author gave each one their own voice and the chance to tell their story. I loved how it all started with a box that contained items from a loved ones past.

The mother/daughter relationship. We are strange creatures aren't we? At times we are each other's best friends and other times could find us bitter enemies.

The Orphan Trains....I read a children's book, Rodzina, which I highly recommend, and this was my first exposure to the fact that this happened to many orphan children in the cities. Makes me want to delve a little bit more into that period of time.

Personal Thoughts:

While I was reading this I realized how lucky that my Grandmother Vyola and her siblings escaped the fate of those that were put on the orphan trains. Her father died first and then almost a year later her mother passed away. No one from the family stood up to take my Grandma and her four brothers (I'm getting very emotional here...this breaks my heart) and so they were sent to a Catholic orphanage in Fort Wayne, Indiana. My Grandma and her younger brother stayed until they aged out, but her other three brothers ran away and joined the service as soon as they could. I lost my Grandma 5 years ago but I never knew about her childhood until it was too late as she had Alzheimer's by the time I was "interested" enough to find out about my loved ones lives. With that personal story in my family this book really resonated with me and touched my heart.

Recommend? Without hesitation. It may spur you to start asking questions about what life was like for your parents growing up and if you're lucky enough to still have your grandparents, take some time today to talk to them...really talk to them!

Rating: 8.5/10

beachbooks says

Touching story spanning three generations. I enjoyed it.

Diane S ? says

3 1/2 but a good story about the way mothers and daughteres interact, also a bit of information about the orphan trains. Well written and enjoyable.

Danielle says

There's more potential to this author than the book lived up to. The three generations of women were each interesting characters in their own right. I particularly liked hearing about scrappy Violet's New York childhood before getting sent west on an Orphan Train. I also enjoyed Iris's reflections on life and death as she faced terminal cancer. I was less-impressed with Samantha's whiney self-absorption and inability to suck it up and get to work, but there were moments I could relate to.

The downfall of the book was in its organization or lack thereof. We skipped around so frequently between the three characters stories that I got whiplash trying to follow the narrative thread. I would have been more impressed if the author could have left each chapter with some kind of connection to the next, but the starts and stops all felt random. It was also frustrating to realize that despite these three women (and, actually, four women, since we see Violet's mother a fair amount) being mothers and daughters, they gain precious little understanding or insight into each other's lives. That is left to the reader, but never the women themselves. This left the story feeling both disjointed and incomplete, since the mothers and daughters never seem to be anything but baffled by each other.

At any rate, the characters and the writing were good enough for me to stick with this book to the end, but not good enough for me to recommend it.

Tiffany says

I feel guilty that I have to give this book one star, but I just have to. I was expecting something completely different from what I found. The description on the cover of this book is nothing at all what you get. Not only was it not what I was expecting, but it was boring. I kept waiting for something to happen and nothing ever did. There was really no need to even mention the box of Iris's things on the cover because it is barely mentioned. Nothing even comes of it. I couldn't get into it. I also could not get into the writing style. Too many descriptive words thrown into one sentence weighed this story down and it was too much. The only reason I kept reading after page 30 is because I absolutely hate not finishing a book and I just wanted to know what happened to Violet after she got on the train. Another thing, how could Iris and Sam not know anything about Violet? And Sam didn't really know anything about Iris either. Do people not talk to each other? How can you go your whole life and not talk to your mother about her life? I don't get it. I just couldn't connect with any character in this book. The only reason I feel remotely glad I read this book is because of the author's note explaining that these trains did exist. I found that interesting. I don't think I will be reading anything else by this author.

Gayle Parker says

Each chapter is written like a short story. Each chapter follows the lives of 3 generations of women. The book did a wonderful job of weaving in objects and how the significance is different for each person. A great read which helps you reflect on your relationship with your mother and grandmother and daughter.

Danielle Mellott says

I got this book from Early Reviewers on librarything.com. I wanted to like this. I really, really, really did. I did not, however.

Very few books I read get a 2 star rating. I'm relatively easy on most books and give away my 4 and 5 star ratings lavishly. I was originally going to give it a 2.5 stars because I did like SOME of it, while I didn't care for other parts of it- so a 2.5 would have been comfortably right down the middle of love and hate. But I realized something that I can't forgive... this story isn't complete.

First of all- the description is somewhat deceptive. "when a box of Iris's belongings arrive on Sam's doorstep, she discovers things about her mother she never knew- or even could guess," reads the back of this book. That leads me to expect a story about a daughter uncovering truths about her mother and possibly grandmother- which the rest of the description goes on to mention. This book is actually so little about Iris's past that it's hardly even a blip in my recall. Violet, Sam's grandmother, winds up taking center stage in between short 'present' chapters about Iris as an old lady, dying of cancer, and Sam as a new mother after her mom's death.

Here's what I loved- the parts about Violet as a child were interesting. That's really it. It's a good portion of the story, but that doesn't make up for the fact that Violet's childhood is so poorly intertwined with the rest of the story to make sense. Sam is given a box of her mother's possessions that hint that her mom didn't tell her a lot of information, but the book just randomly jumps back and forth between the three women in all different ties with very little sense of ease. Iris' discussion of her impending death just stops, and suddenly we're back with Sam going through some awful, boring, annoying post-partum depression and anxiety about leaving her baby for one day with a sitter. Don't get me wrong- I'm a mom of a toddler and I understand that maybe people who've gone through ppd can relate. The rest of us, however- ok, maybe it's just me, I don't know- haven't gone through it and paragraph after paragraph of her pain and reluctance to leave her baby is just annoying. She had some moments where her observations were accurate, but other than that, Sam was not a likable character. Oh, and a prostitute that she feels bad for a stalks, because that's for some reason important to remind the readers her feelings about mothering. I mean, I get it- she thinks that this young prostitute probably lacked a nice mother figure in her life. But it was so random and out of place in the story.

I was originally going to call the end of the book 'abrupt'. but when I hear that word I think that it was at least an ending where things were tied together albeit quickly. The last we hear of Sam, she has found a mysterious letter that she is going to investigate to discover more about her mom and grandma. But then we jump back to Violet where the story is quickly concluded... abrupt would be the correct word for her story. She gets married, dies after having two kids, one stillborn, felt content aside from those memories of being free and reckless on the streets as a kid. Unsatisfying, but at least we know what happened. But what the heck about Sam? The author never went back to actually show Sam in the act of discovering any information at all. In fact, as far as the reader is aware, she has learning NOTHING about her mom or grandma except that she didn't know much at all about them. She doesn't learn why her Grandmother knew how to knit or bake desserts so well. She doesn't learn her history before she was 11 in the midwest. We, as the reader, learn these things in the form of a third person story, but Sam, the person who we are told discovers the past of her mom and grandmother- learns nothing at all. We don't get to see her reaction to anything at all. All we get to see of Sam is her floundering in her marriage because she's irrationally obsessed and worried about her baby, taking things out of a box her brother sends her, wondering about it's contents, and baking a pound cake to give to a strange neighbor.

This had the potential to be a wonderful, heart-warming story about the bonds of mothers and daughters and how they shape each other. Instead the read has to fill in the connections between these women with random bits of information we're given. Tying things together shouldn't be the readers job, it's the authors responsibility. This isn't a finished story and I feel I've wasted time reading it. (

Luanne Ollivier says

Mothers & Daughters by Rae Meadows is the story of three women.

Sam is a new mother who is having a hard time adjusting to life with a daughter of her own. She is afraid to leave Ella with anyone else and has been unable to get back to her career as a potter after nearly a year. Her relationship with her husband has changed as well..." Since the baby, it seemed her feelings toward him required moment-to moment readjustment."

Sam's mother Iris died just before Ella was born. A box containing mementos of Iris's life ends up on Sam's doorstep. As she goes through the box, she discovers things she never learned about her mother while she was alive. And her grandmother Violet as well.

Meadows explores the mother/daughter dynamic between each of the women. Each women's past influences how she mothers her own daughter. The daughters really don't know their mothers intimately. The story of each of the women is told in revolving chapters.

I became so invested in the story of Violet and her mother Lilibeth. Violet ended up on an Orphan Train, sent from New York City to the arms of a 'suitable' home. I was fascinated by her story and found myself wanting more than was written. Without giving away the storyline, Iris's life saddened me. Parts of her tale moved me to tears. I found Sam a bit hard to like in the beginning - she seemed somewhat self indulgent, but I came to appreciate her by the end of the book.

I quite enjoyed discovering who each woman was, how her life was shaped and how that in turn influenced the next generation. A thoughtful book that might make you take a second look at the relationship you have with your own mother.

Edan says

This book--about the lives of three generations of women--was such a smooth, lovely read. At first I worried it was a bit too easy, a bit too smooth, but as it went on there were passages that really made me pause to think, to revel in the beauty of the prose and the cleverness of its intertwining tales. I liked reading about motherhood and what's passed down from mother to daughter. This was a book I kept reading, especially when I should have been writing or washing dishes or paying attention to my dog. It was a wonderful morning-book--it seemed to match the warm light of my apartment as the day's just getting started...

Sometimes I felt like the chapters were a bit too short. Each one focuses on one of three women, and I'd have to switch to the next character right as I was getting into the current one. I would have liked more sustained attention on each character, I suppose. Also, occasionally, Violet's sections--which are historical--were so

colorful that they felt almost too cinematic, if that makes any sense.

I did like how Meadows focused on one day in the life of Sam, the contemporary character, a mother of infant Ella, and then, for Sam's mother, Iris, the chapters covered a few days (which took place a year before the Sam sections). Violet's sections--from the early 1900s (or late 1800s?)--cover quite a bit more time. These shifts in time were seamless, and I didn't even notice the differences until near the end of the book. Some of Sam's sections reminded me of *Mrs Dalloway* (because of Sam's 1-day, and the crises therein), and the whole book had a similar appeal that *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham does. It's fitting that Iris is reading *Woolf* (*To The Lighthouse*), in her sections...

Oh, and I love the evocation of setting in the novel, from Madison, WI to Sanibel Island, Florida, to the early tenements of New York City. It was all wonderfully detailed and rich.

Overall, this a pleasurable and thoughtful novel.

(If only the cover weren't so goddamned PINK and CHEESY! I hope that doesn't detract readers like me-- ladies who don't go for butterfly wings. Grrr...)

Snotchocheez says

3 stars

(ugh...two hours of typing down the tubes, lost to the ether; this is a hastily typed re-write)

There was plenty of great writing on display here, despite my being daunted by breaking into an all-girls party (or so it seemed with a title like *Mothers and Daughters*, the cover art, and back cover blurb seeming to yell "Stay Away Boys!"...since rectified in a subsequent printing with a title change *Mercy Train* and new cover art). Though this is a female-centric novel, it's not what I'd consider chick-lit. Three seemingly disparate female protagonists' stories are interwoven in a compelling fashion. The first, Sam(antha), a ceramics artist from Madison, Wisconsin with severe mommy-anxiety as her daughter Ella approaches toddlerhood; Iris, a septuagenarian living on Sanibel Island in Florida, wracked with breast cancer; and lastly (in the most interesting, yet most problematic of the three stories) Violet, an eleven year-old from Kentucky whose mother Lilibeth (with extremely questionable parenting skills) moves Violet at the turn of the Twentieth Century to NYC, where she ends up being a poverty-stricken street urchin. It is this story that Ms. Meadows based in (unbeknownst to me) historical fact: the Orphan Train Movement, where a church-based relief organization rounded up orphans and other street kids and shipped them west to either try to get them adopted, or foisted into indentured servitude.

While this last story was terrific, I could not quite see how it tied to the other two. I think I'd much rather had this story expanded upon and the other two dropped. Not necessarily because they were bad, but the three stories together just weren't cohesive enough for me.

While this book wasn't entirely to my liking, I was still impressed by Ms. Meadows deft writing skill: for tackling difficult subjects with grace (from abortion to assisted suicide) and establishing setting, creating solid characters and believable dialogue. I am still quite interested in her latest (2016) release *I Will Send Rain* which I'm confident will be a great read. You might (in case I "read it wrong") want to try this one as well.

Amy says

I really liked this book. It is a very well written book based on three characters over three generations. At times I thought the author was trying too hard using obscure language as if to say (here are words that no one knows, see how smart I am), but that could just be because I didn't know those words. It was a little annoying, but also a little impressive. I loved how the story of each woman unraveled a little bit at a time while the characters developed. The character of Sam was hard to figure out, but she was still endearing. There is a lot of pain, guilt and redemption there. Her last moments with her mom were very healing for me.

It's the story of how three generations of women come together as a box of belongings is gone through by Sam who lost her mother a year before. It is hard to understand how Sam (the woman going through the box) know so little of her mother, who died the year before, but you begin to learn that the previous generations of women, Iris and Violet, didn't share much about their pasts.

It was especially touching to me having just lost my mom 8 1/2 months ago and only just going through her house last month, stumbling upon some things I wish I could ask about. It was a very interesting book.

There is some bad language, but no explicit scenes in it. I would recommend it to anyone of my goodread friends. It definitely will want you be a little better about communicating with your mother AND your kids about your life. Because if your comes down to a dusty few things in a box, then their significance is everything.

Lynn says

This book is richly imagined and emotionally conveyed. I was impressed by the depth of the descriptions of different times & places. I liked the interwoven narratives and the different perspectives conveyed by this novel. I could relate to a lot of the feelings of the character Samantha as she tried to understand her new identity as a mother. I read this book in one day. The stories are very compelling.

Alison Roybal says

While it was really well written it was hard to follow how the 3 were connected.

Kar-Leigh says

Surprisingly intriguing.

At least for me. Usually any mention of the word 'mother' has me running, certain it's going to contain sappy wisdom and heartfelt thoughts about moms. And I mean yeah, it does contain that a bit, but it also takes an honest look at the maternal traits of the three fictional characters.

Following Sam, Iris, and Violet, 'Mothers and Daughters' follows the three generations of women through their unremarkable, yet curiously absorbing lives. My favourite chapters were the ones devoted to Violet, which told of her childhood in 1900 New York City as what some would refer to as a "street urchin." They were fascinating. That being said, Irish and Sam's chapters were also interesting in their own uniquely different ways. The way Meadows weaves the complete tale of the three generations together is simply beautiful.

I would recommend this to any woman--or man, for that matter--interested in the insight three women would potentially have to share, from late-Victorian NYC, to the sixties in the midwest, to present day in the midwest. Whether it be to gain a new perspective, or to find familiarity in experiences shared with women of these generations.

Jennie says

I believe I saw this book reviewed on a few book blogs one day so I added it to my hold list at the library. I had almost forgotten about it when I got the email telling me it was waiting for me to pick up but after reading the blurb on the inside flap I remembered how good it sounded. I wish it had lived up to my expectations but it fell a little short.

I enjoyed the premise, especially being a new mother (well, she's almost two but every day feels so new to me) I had felt many of the same insecurities that Samantha felt. Some of that shared connection ended with her inability to remember who she was pre-baby. Many women don't have the ability (or choose not to) to ignore their work like she did with her pottery business. I did enjoy the mystery surrounding the box of her Mother's mementos that land on Samantha's doorstep. This method of discovery was believable and practical given the death of a parent.

At first the flipping back and forth between main characters and time periods was hard to follow but I soon began to enjoy the way the stories flowed together given the number of years separating the women. This method shows the thread that can bind a family through generations even among secrets and untold stories.

One aspect of this story that really took me out of the moment was the dialog and happenings when Samantha was in her car with her 8-month old baby. Numerous times it was said that she looked in the rearview mirror and looked at her baby smiling at her or something. Almost all states in the US require infants to be rear-facing until one year and 20 pounds. Therefore it is most unlikely that her daughter would have been facing forward to where she could see her smiling or crying in her rear view mirror. There are mirrors you can buy that go on the back seat with the kid to reflect in the rearview mirror to see them but the way the text was worded this wasn't the case for Samantha. Given how overprotective Samantha was with her daughter I highly doubt she would have her forward facing illegally early. It may not be a big thing to some, but this was a major hurdle for me to get past especially since there were more than one scene where this impacted the plot/dialogue.
