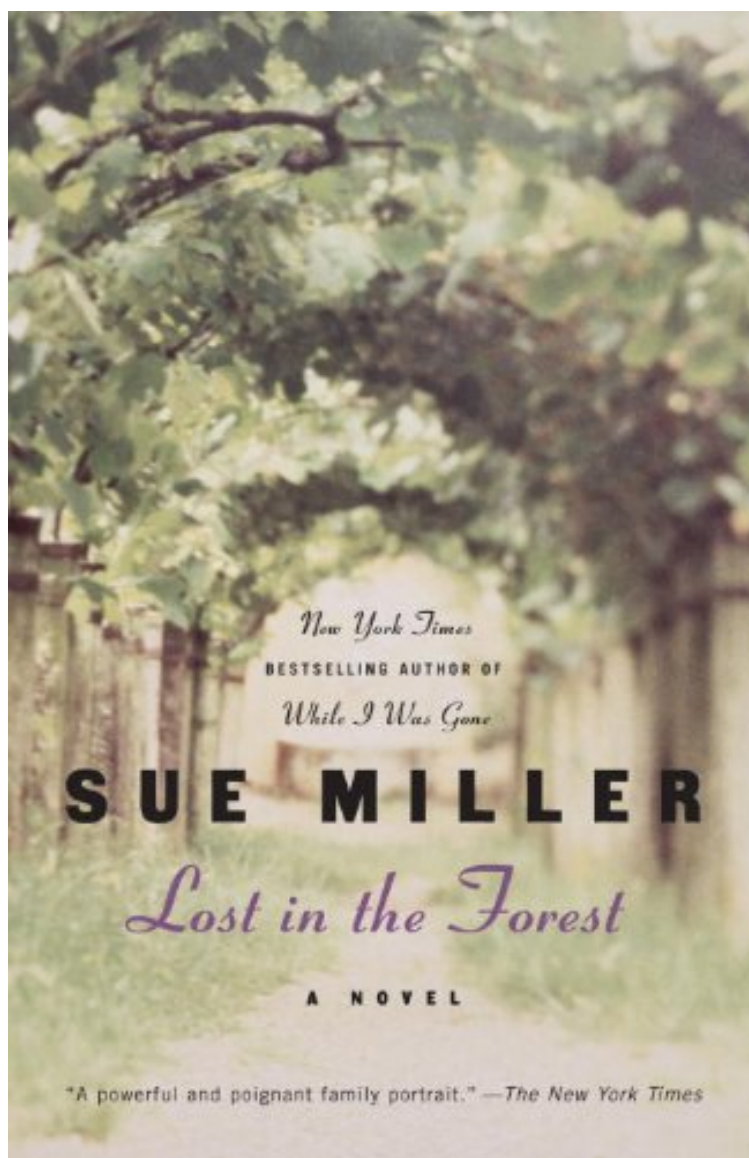


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Lost in the Forest



Par Sue Miller
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Description :

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damaging love affair with a much older man. Eva, a divorced and happily remarried mother of three, runs a small bookstore in a town north of San Francisco. When her second husband, John, is killed in a car accident, her family's fragile peace is once again overtaken by loss. Emily, the eldest, must grapple with newfound independence and responsibility. Theo, the youngest, can only begin to fathom his father's death. But for Daisy, the middle child, John's absence opens up a world of bewilderment, exposing her at the onset of adolescence to the chaos and instability that hover just beyond the safety of parental love. In her sorrow, Daisy embarks on a harrowing sexual odyssey, a journey that will cast her even farther out onto the harsh promontory of adulthood and lost hope. With astonishing sensuality and immediacy, *Lost in the Forest* moves through the most intimate realms of domestic life, from grief and sex to adolescence and marriage. It is a stunning, kaleidoscopic evocation of a family in crisis, written with delicacy and masterful care. For her lifelong fans and those just discovering Sue Miller for the first time, here is a rich and gorgeously layered tale of a family breaking apart and coming back together again: Sue Miller at her inimitable best. From the Hardcover edition.

Emily telephoned, his older daughter. "Can you come get us?" she said. "It's an emergency." As usual, she didn't greet him, she didn't say hello at the start of the call. And also as usual, this bothered him, he felt a familiar pull of irritation at her voice, her tone. But even as he was listening to her, he was focused on steering the truck around the sharp curves in the narrow road, around several small heaps of rock that had slid down the steep hillside: he was feeling the pleasure he always took in the way the slanted afternoon light played on the yellowed grass and reddened leaves left in the vineyards, in the way the air smelled. He kept his voice neutral as he responded. "When? Now?" In the background, behind her, Mark could hear someone give a sudden whoop. Festivities, he thought. As ever. Eva's face rose in his mind--his ex-wife. At the least excuse, there was a gathering at her house: to celebrate a birthday--reasonable enough; but also for a project completed, a team victory, a skill accomplished. You learned to ride a bike, you got a party thrown for you. "Duh. Yes, Dad, now," Emily said. "That's what I mean." He was headed north on 128 to a small vineyard he thought his crew should harvest tomorrow. He needed to check the grapes. But he could probably get Angel to do it if he had to. His windows were open. The noise of the rushing air made his daughter's voice on the car phone sound distant. "So?" she said. "Can you?" If his younger daughter, Daisy, had ever called him because of an emergency, it would have been a child's crisis--not making the basketball team, needing a ride somewhere that her mother or stepfather couldn't provide. But with Emily, this emergency was likely to be at least slightly serious, an emergency in near-adult terms. Terms he might even be sympathetic with. But she would be taking charge again, and this was something he and his ex-wife had agreed that she should be discouraged--no, freed--from doing so often. He cleared his throat. "Maybe I should talk to your mom," he said. Yes. The approach to take. "Dad!" she objected. He didn't answer for a long moment, and as if in response to this, her voice had changed when she spoke again. She sounded younger: "Mom can't talk right now. That's why we need you." And with those words, we need you, it was settled. To be needed. Well. Mark thought of Emily's delicate oval face, her regular, pretty features, her curly dark hair, so like Eva's--all the things that were lovely about her. All the things that didn't piss him off. "Okay," he said. "Okay, as it happens, I can come. As it happens, I will." She wouldn't be charmed. "Now?" she said impatiently. "Now. Or, gimme ten or so." He was slowing, and as he pulled into a turnaround by the roadside, the truck bounced and his tires crunched on the dusty gravel. "Okay." She sighed, in relief it seemed. "Just honk, though," she said. "We'll come out. Oh, and Dad?" "Yeah?" "It's for overnight." "It could not be for overnight. He had plans. He had a date. He was going to get laid." "Okay, sunshine," he said. "We'll work it all out." She sighed again and hung up. Twenty minutes or so later, when he pulled up at the curb in front of his ex-wife's large Victorian house, the door opened before he hit the horn and his younger daughter staggered out onto the wide porch, carrying her sleeping bag, her pack an oversize hump on her back. Daisy was barefoot. Her long brown legs were exposed nearly to the crotch in cutoff jeans--legs that were beginning to look less like sticks and more like a woman's, he noted. Emily came out the door after her, turned backward as if to fuss with something behind her. Two pretty, dark, young women, one tall, one short: his daughters. He got out of the truck to go and help them. As he started up the walk, he saw Theo emerging from the house behind Emily. The little boy, not yet three, was carrying a brown paper grocery bag by its handles. Something stuck out of it--a pillow? a blanket? He spotted Mark and smiled. Now Emily took Theo's hand to help him down the wide porch stairs. He paused on each one, and the bag plopped slowly from step to step behind him as he descended. Mark met them on the walk. "Hey," he said. He kissed each girl on her head. They smelled identical, a ladylike herbal perfume: shared shampoo. He took Daisy's sleeping bag from her. "Theo!" he said, and extended his hand down to him. "To what do we owe this

pleasure?" "I'll explain it all to you," Emily called back. She had moved ahead of them down the walk, between the orderly gray-green procession of rosemary plants. She was tossing her stuff into the open back of the truck. "So he's supposed to spend the night too?" Mark asked Daisy. Theo was not his son. Theo was his ex-wife's son, by her second marriage. He liked Theo. He was, in fact, charmed by him--he knew him well from various extended-family events--but he had never before been asked to babysit for him. And actually, no one had even asked. Daisy shrugged. She looked, as she often did, sullen. Or evasive. Her face was narrower than Emily's, her nose still slightly too big on it--she was fourteen--her eyebrows darker and thick. She had shot up within the last two years, and now she was only a few inches shorter than Mark. She carried it badly, trying to hide it. Mark had worried when she was younger that she would be plain, which seemed to him an almost unbearably sad thing--a plain woman. Within the last six months or so, though, her face had changed and strengthened, and he saw that that wouldn't be the case. That she might, in fact, be better-looking than Emily in the end, more striking. It had made him easier around her, he realized. They had caught up to Emily, who said again, "I'll explain it later." She sounded irritated, as though she were the adult and he a nagging child. She took Theo's hand and led him to the door of the truck's cab. Mark went around to the driver's side. He opened his door and stood there looking across the cab's wide seat, waiting for Emily to look back at him. She wouldn't. Or she didn't. First she was helping the little boy clamber into the truck; now she climbed up herself and was busy buckling him in. When she finally raised her eyes and met her father's, he was ready. He lifted his hands. "Hey, Em," he said. "You will admit--" "Daddy, it's an emergency. A real emergency." Her eyes, he noted now, were red-rimmed, their lids swollen. Theo looked over at him and nodded. "It's a emergency," he said, and inserted his thumb into his mouth with an air of finality. Daisy squeezed in next to Emily, and Mark got in and started the truck. He pulled into the street. After nearly a full minute had passed, he asked, "So, the nature of this emergency is . . . ?" He could feel Emily's gaze on him, and he looked at her. She was frowning--her dark eyebrows made fierce lines. She shook her head. "We can't . . . we shouldn't . . . talk about it now." She gestured at Theo, sitting between them, watching them soberly. Mark nodded. After another long moment he said, "But at some point it will be revealed." "Yeah," she said. She turned away, and when he looked over again, he saw that she and Daisy were holding hands. What the hell was going on? Daisy's mouth hung open stupidly, as though she'd been sucker punched. They drove in near-total silence the whole way to his house. Everyone's eyes stayed devoutly on the road, as though the familiar scenes rolling past--the valley as it widened out and spread the fall colors of its vineyards before them, the deep green of the hills riding along above it all--were some new and fascinating nature movie. Once Daisy said in a near-whisper, "Are those pills supposed to knock her out or something?" and Emily shrugged. That was it. Knock who out? Not Eva, he thought. He imagined her, his ex-wife--small, dark, quick moving, graceful. Her sudden sexy smile. Not Eva. Above Calistoga, he turned in at the unmarked dirt road to his house. There were sparse, newly planted vineyards on either side of it. He had to swerve and dance the truck to avoid the ruts. He could feel Theo's weight swing against his side. After about a quarter of a mile, he pulled into his driveway and then up onto the cement pad where one day he planned to build a garage. As soon as he cut the engine, they could hear the dogs barking in the house. The children started to unbuckle their seat belts, and he swung himself out of the truck. He began to gather their possessions from the back. They came and stood behind him--silent, oddly passive, waiting for their things to be put into their hands. He led the way. When he opened the back door, the dogs shot out and started jumping around, abruptly quieted by their joy in being released. Their heavy tails whacked everyone. Theo made a little noise of terror and delight and stepped between Mark's legs, gripping his thighs. Mark put his hands on the boy's narrow shoulders, and was instantly startled--and then aware of being startled. Why? Why did it feel so strange to touch the little boy? Perhaps because he had anticipated the way the girls felt when they were Theo's size, when he had loved to touch them, to hold them. Theo's body was wiry and tense, utterly unlike theirs at the same age. It felt hot with energy. "It's okay, big guy," Mark said gently. "They like you. They like kids like you." Theo looked up at Mark, wide-eyed and alarmed. "They would like to ea...Prsentation de l'diteur For nearly two decades, since the publication of her iconic first novel, *The Good Mother*, Sue Miller has distinguished herself as one of our most elegant and widely celebrated chroniclers of family life, with a singular gift for laying bare the interior lives of her characters. 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