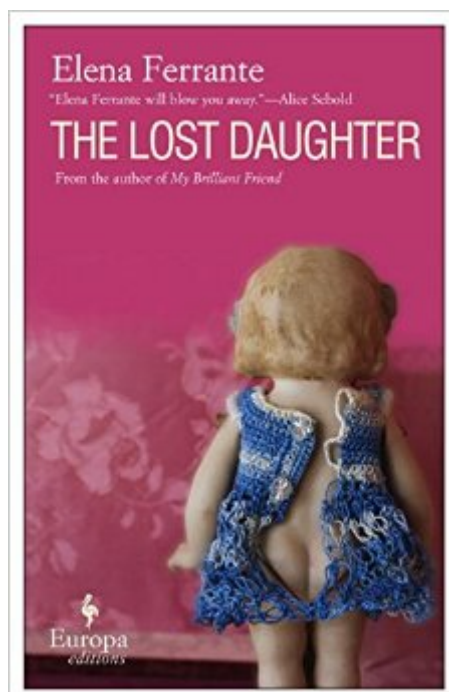


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The Lost Daughter



Synopsis

From the author of *My Brilliant Friend* "Elena Ferrante will blow you away."-Alice Sebold, author of *The Lovely Bones* From the author of *The Days of Abandonment*, *The Lost Daughter* is Elena Ferrante's most compelling and perceptive meditation on womanhood and motherhood yet. Leda, a middle-aged divorcee, is alone for the first time in years when her daughters leave home to live with their father. Her initial, unexpected sense of liberty turns to ferocious introspection following a seemingly trivial occurrence. Ferrante's language is as finely tuned and intense as ever, and she treats her theme with a fierce, candid tenacity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Leda is a 47 year-old divorced woman, and mother to daughters, Bianca and Marta, now 22 and 24. The girls have recently moved from Italy to Toronto, Canada to live with their father. Leda is well educated and teaches at the university in Florence, Italy. Leda was not upset when her daughters moved away, in fact it was quite the opposite: "When my daughters moved to Toronto, where their father had lived and worked for years, I was embarrassed and amazed to discover that I wasn't upset; rather, I felt light, as if only then had I definitively brought them into the world. For the first time in almost twenty-five years I was not aware of the anxiety of having to take care of them. The house was neat, as if no one lived there, I no longer had the constant bother of shopping and doing the laundry, the woman who for years had helped with the household chores found a better paying job, and I felt no need to replace her." It's summer and since she is feeling happy about her new freedom, Leda decides to rent a beach house for six weeks, on the Ionian coast, near Naples. She

packs her books and lesson plans for the coming school year and is planning to relax by lounging on the beach by day. Early on she becomes fascinated by the interactions of an attractive young mother named Nina, and her young daughter, Elena. She also intently watches little Elena's interactions with her doll, which the girl calls by several different names. Several other family members visit the family on the beach as well. One day Leda notices the child by the water's edge, so she returns her to her mother who was lying on the beach blanket and hadn't noticed the child had wandered to the water. Another day when the family leaves the beach for the day, Leda notices that Elena's beloved doll was left buried in the sand. This incident upsets Leda, and suddenly this event, along with the interactions of mother and child, opens a floodgate of memories for Leda of her own days as a young mother. Some of the incidents which she recalls of things she did, and ways she reacted to her own daughters --were cringe-worthy. This brief novella, just 124 pages, is sure to evoke emotions among readers, especially mothers. Narrated in the first person, this deep journey into a mother's psyche, gives the reader plenty to think about. Marriage, motherhood, personal freedom, sacrifice and career fulfillment are some of the conflicting issues that surface in this work. Initially, I thought I might have a problem with the flow of the story due to the translation, but that was not the case. Once I got into the rhythm and into what was going on in Leda's head, I was hooked. I liked this one a lot, and would definitely recommend it.

Bright lights cause dark shadows and this book takes on the light of motherhood and its corresponding darker aspects. It is not a crime thriller where the children--grown and young--are in danger, it is a look into the psychology of a woman who never made peace with the sacrifice required by motherhood, but who needed the experience and her children for sanity. When her daughters left home---this is a very female, womanly book but not girly--old issues started to crop up. The psychology rings true and the ending is surprising. Although this author has never been seen in public and there are rumors of various famous authors who may be writing under an alias, I will be surprised if a man has written this book. It is an easy read and I plan to read everything by this author.

One almost never finds women authors who have the wherewithal to speak honestly about motherhood, the difficult choices women (esp. women intellectuals) face in society, and other issues surrounding female identity in this supposedly "post-feminist" age. I can think of no contemporary American woman writer who is as unsparingly honest and courageous in their writing as Ferrante is in hers.

I've been reading Elena Ferrante's novels since this summer. Like many others, I picked up *My Brilliant Friend* and ended up reading the whole trilogy in two weeks of more or less sleepless nights. Like many others, I was stunned by the frankness, the willingness to explore matters others leave untouched. And like many others, I ordered the rest of Ferrante's novels. I started with *Troubling Love*, which I will probably also review, and have just finished *The Lost Daughter*. This book is one of the most powerful novels I've ever read. On the face of things, a novel with a very slight plot: an educated middle-aged woman with family issues goes on a seaside holiday, commits a nearly meaningless act, and consequences ensue. However, building on this slight point of departure, Ferrante takes us once again into wild territories: the deep ambivalence of mothers towards their children, the significance of insignificant actions, the terrors of being honest with oneself, and more. For me, as a man, reading Ferrante on being a woman in this world, a mother, a daughter, a sexual being, is an unsettling experience. Ferrante portrays a psychological world that forces the reader with the need to either identify with the narrator's frame of reference, or to figure out why not. Readers often say that they dislike Ferrante's protagonists, and find nothing much to like about her other characters (who are almost always antagonists) either. For me, this is tangential to the experience of reading her novels, and this novel in particular: Ferrante consistently confronts the reader with the question: Can I bear being myself, since I cannot be anything or anyone else? As an aside, I am entranced by Ferrante's narrators: writing in the first person, Ferrante's narrators elude being characterised as 'reliable' or 'unreliable.' They are reliable and unreliable just like we are. Have you ever found yourself recounting something that happened to you, and changing details, eliding important facts, embellishing, deleting? Have you known why you are doing it? This gap of knowledge or understanding is the gap that Ferrante's narrators bring to the foreground. I find here something reminiscent of Ishiguro's narrators, but in most of Ishiguro's novels, this gap is resolved or at least brought to a crisis point. Ferrante's genius is that she leaves the gap as it is, and this is the space that her narrators inhabit. I would definitely recommend this book for readers who aren't afraid of a challenging, even unsettling read.

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