



The Wild

Esther Freud

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Nine-year-old Tess has never seen anything like *The Wild*. An old bakery, converted into a home, it has a fireplace big enough to sit in, a garden with a badminton net and another one for vegetables. And then there's William, its owner. Single father of three, he cooks homemade ravioli, cuts trees down with a chainsaw and plays the guitar. When her mother, Francine, rents two rooms from him, Tess can hardly believe her luck. Her brother Jake, however, proves harder to convince. As the two grown-ups begin to fall for each other, Tess struggles to please the adults, as well as win Jake round. But she finds that good intentions don't always bring happiness and that adults are disturbingly capable of making mistakes.

The Wild Details

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Sarah says

I started reading this a few years ago but it didn't really grab me. This time around I slipped into it a bit easier, & I did end up enjoying it. Yes, it's very middle-class & comes with the usual eccentricities of that class, but that actually helps the story.

I found some of the characters difficult to relate to or to sympathise with, but that actually made the ending feel more satisfying so I suspect that was the emotion that the author wanted to provoke. I liked the use of foreshadowing which kept me wondering throughout the rest of the story until the conclusion answered all the questions. It made the book that more interesting but at the same time didn't spoil the ending for me, which can sometimes be the case.

I thought this book was ok, but I can't say I was engrossed in it. An easy read for entertainment really.

Jael says

I picked up this book because I liked Hideous Kinky and Peerless Flats. I think it's my favourite one now. It has a deep sadness that only a step child can feel when you feel you don't fit, or when a step parent doesn't like you. Tess is a lonely, anxious child and I really felt for her and her brother. All the adults in the book are a bit rubbish, and William is dreadful. Freud portrays the disjointedness of a blended family well from a child's point of view. It is a melancholy book with only the pathetic, ridiculous behaviour of William providing the lighter moments.

Zarina says

I am not sure what the purpose of telling this story was or what the reader was supposed to take away from it. While Tess is the main character and the reader is supposed to see the male characters she so looks up to (William, Victor) through her eyes they just come across as incredibly unlikeable and improbable choices for her adoration. Furthermore the story is told in short chapters and paragraphs that are all very disjointed making it an uncomfortable and unnecessarily disorganised read. In short: I did not see the point to this book at all.

Kim says

This was an okay saga about families, step-families and the tensions produced when ex-partners disturb proceedings. When Francine and her two children Tess and Jake move in to share a house with single dad William and his three daughters, Tess tries to 'match-make'. As her plans bear fruit, Tess finds that her brother Jake bears increasing animosity towards William, culminating in a near tragedy. 7/10.

Susan says

I found this to be beautifully written and painfully accurate. I loved it and spent the whole book trying to work out which child it was in scene 1. I loved the slow revelation of what type of man William is and the subtle way Tess's neediness is portrayed. Impressive.

Nicolas says

This books has led me to suffer and rejoice with its characters as no other book ever has, perhaps with the exception of Vasconzuelos' "Mi Planta de Naranja-Lima"

Cathy says

Having just spent a week slogging up to page 50 before abandoning a book I was increasingly coming to dislike, it was such a joy to find myself immediately hooked by this book, and I gobbled it up in 3 days. Told mainly from the point of view of 9 year old Tess, it's a wonderful portrait of two families trying to live together in changing circumstances, and is also about all the stuff the children aren't told but work out, learn or are just baffled by. The setting, both in terms of time and place, is beautifully evoked. We see less of William's children, but Francine, Tess and Jake, and William are all brilliantly realised, and some of William's actions towards Tess made me wince in heartfelt sympathy for her.

I suspect that this is one of those books whose very readability belies the skill and craft it took to make it so. Fabulous.

Jill says

A very disjointed story of a blended family told from the point of view of a young girl, Tess. The adults are all unattractive and I felt sorry for the children trapped in the care of these aging hippies, but found little to amuse or entertain.

Amanda Carver says

Was an OK book, I just didn't get where it was going, not much of a storyline to it and not a great ending. This is just my opinion and we are all different, you may love it.

Josie Downer says

Subtle and destructive, this book is mostly from the innocent perspective of young Tess. So infatuated with her landlord and her need for someone to care for her mother, herself and her brother that she is blinded to what is really going on.

This book is a really intelligent perspective of how a child sees life - not dumbing down, complex with it's layers of understanding, but with utter naivety, and lack of life experience to recognise the signs of when it really would be wise to get out of a situation! As a reader you are taken on Tess's journey, things are hinted at, but you're almost as shocked as she is when you pick up on upsetting twists in the plot! I shall say no more...

Bex says

I really did want to like this book, and while I did feel really sorry for Tess, the central character, I just hated William, the guy who's trying to be with her mother, so much it made the rest of the book nearly impossible to enjoy. Yes I read the book fast, but mainly just because I wanted to get it over with. Disappointing, as i've loved all her other books.

Scott Goldie says

I enjoyed this, though at times it is deeply sad. Well written and often moving, my only real criticism is the adults in the story. They appear so helpless and flawed - but maybe that's the point.

Julia says

Eh... I rated this 3 stars at first... because I wanted to like it. Unfortunately, the plot lines were disjointed, the perspective changed back and forth during the second half of the book and made things confusing and perhaps worst of all, none of the characters were likable. The girl narrator, Tess, was pathetic, the main guy character, William, was a total jerk and none of the other characters adult or child had any backbone or interest either. So overall, no.

Josie says

I read this because Hideous Kinky is a favourite of mine, and I was expecting it to be better as Hideous Kinky was Esther Freud's first novel. It was sorely disappointing. I couldn't sympathise with the main character (Tess) at all. It's all in third person, but sometimes it's told from her point of view, sometimes from William's (her stepfather) point of view. Tess looks up to William in a sickening way, whereas William dislikes her "awkward, grubby body pressing in too close" - the whole tone made me feel uncomfortable. The plot didn't go anywhere, and I put this down feeling like I'd wasted my time.

Ape says

This was a really great read. Esther Freud has a brilliant writing style and she particularly excels when writing about children.

This one is set in the south of England in the 70s and is about hippies and their children. It particularly focuses on Tess, who has moved to new rented rooms with her older brother, Jake, and her mother. They have moved in with a single father, William, and his three daughters. Tess idolises William and is desperate for him to like her - and the story is in part her growing up and learning that even adults are not perfect and make mistakes, and that you shouldn't have to be so desperate for someone's approval. But I think it's also William that has to learn that no one is perfect. Can't say I liked him. He's a perfectionist and a bit of a control freak, self-righteous and certain his way is the only way. It is never made clear why it ended with his wife, but over the story you get the impression he was being unreasonable, which makes it all the more surprising that he got custody of the three girls.

Unsurprisingly, the mother and William have an affair and have a baby, but this relationship is doomed not to last. The announcement of her pregnancy comes hot on the heels of the birth of William's ex-wife's new son and once the baby is born he is soon lusting after their young lodger.

Jake, Tess' older brother, sees through William, quite unforgivingly of course (again unable to accept adults aren't perfect and don't always get it right, although in a different way to Tess) and this confrontation between the two men reaches a climax at the end of the story.

These are my bookcrossing thoughts, as written in 2007.
