



## Pictures of You

*Caroline Leavitt*

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## **Pictures of You** Caroline Leavitt

Two women running away from their marriages collide on a foggy highway, killing one of them. The survivor is left to pick up the pieces, not only of her own life, but also must go back and deal with the devastated husband and fragile, asthmatic son the other woman left behind. Together, they try to solve the mystery of where April was running to, and why. By turns riveting and unsettling, *Pictures of You* looks at the choices women make-the roads they choose-to be loved.

## **Pictures of You Details**

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Author : Caroline Leavitt

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## From Reader Review Pictures of You for online ebook

### Lynn says

Two women running away from their husbands meet - fatally- on a foggy road. Only one survives. How do you forgive someone who irrevocably changes your life? How do you forgive yourself? Does the fact that you weren't even at fault in all this make it any easier, especially when there is a child involved? Some readers have compared this author's writing to Jodi Picoult's. In fact, Jodi Picoult herself wrote a blurb for this book. Since she is among my favorite authors, I went into this book with high expectations. Well, you know the warning about having expectations... I liked the premise, and the themes of love, forgiveness and redemption seemed promising but, I don't know, for me at least, it never jelled the way I had hoped it would. Most of the characters were under-developed, and motivations seem either non-existent or so murky as to be unintelligible. Would people really behave the way the author has written them? I found it hard to suspend my disbelief in most of the situations. Not bad but not a satisfying read either.

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### Carol says

I want to read more by Caroline Leavitt. Pictures of You was far from perfect but Leavitt's writing has potential. I'm usually not particularly fussy about spelling and rarely notice when facts don't quite jive or something in one scene isn't quite the same in another. I wish I had noted the actual instances where this happened but I didn't. All I know is I was a bit irritated when it happened. Little things, little things but enough to niggle my conscience and made the read less enjoyable.

I *did* enjoy the story as a whole. I loved the plot; two women running and way from their marriages colliding in a horrific accident that leaves one dead and the other with questions a lifetime couldn't answer. I really liked Sam, the dead woman, April's son, who yearns for an angel to help him communicate with the mother he lost. The adult men, namely the husbands, were far less likable. They truly irked me at times. A strong theme woven throughout the book is photography and what the camera lens captures that might not be seen. This is where the book really shines.

One part of the book had me daydreaming back to childhood and was delightful It is a scene about Sam and Isabelle (the survivor) skipping stones and is nicely written. It reminded me of doing the same with my dad and how much fun it is when you can get a series of ripples going.

Good story...writing possibilities. A 3.5 if I could give half stars.

Give it another try Caroline and I will too!

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### Debbie "DJ" says

Just a wonderful heartfelt book about an unlikely relationship. Very candid and honest, I couldn't wait to see how the characters unfolded, such a feel good book, but also a tearjerker.

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## **Pamela says**

I wanted to like this book. I suspect it ended up in my to read pile because of the Cape connection. But, ugh, I just couldn't like it at all. The characters were flat, the conversations were all over the place and unnatural, and I just couldn't care about any of it. There was all sorts of stuff that bugged: Like the accident happens and no one, for chapters and chapters (and it's being told first person, so this is a big suspension of disbelief), brings up how it's a massive coincidence that both women from this tiny town are in this same random side road hours from home. Sam can't go to NYC because of his asthma, but Isabelle just brushes that fact aside and concludes that Charlie must just not care about her to not uproot his life and put his kid's health at risk to jet off to NYC with her -- and she supposedly cares so very much about Sam? So many more issues with the book, these are just examples of things that made it impossible to get into it.

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## **Meghan says**

This was a very readable book, and it was easy to get into and follow. Like a Jodi Picoult, it had a few unexpected twists, and it was full of characters and unique plotlines. HOWEVER-- and this is essential, in my opinion-- when you have such a character-laden story, those characters have to be believable no matter what their actions or their words are. And I just didn't believe in the way the characters inevitably ended up. I didn't believe in their final destinations, I didn't believe in their responses to many of the things that happened, and I didn't, for the most part, feel connected to any of them. I read this because I'd read a very strong book review for it (in its favor)... I ended up finishing it feeling like, finally its done, now I need a good book. My two stars are a bit generous, really.

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## **Melissa Crytzer Fry says**

Wow! I think this may be the best word to sum up this wonderfully emotional story of individuals brought together by the darkest tragedy. Caroline Leavitt is the master of "show don't tell," weaving a tale of secrecy, regret, and ultimately one of acceptance for the paths life chooses FOR us. It's a story of love and all its complexity: between child and mother, between husband and wife, between man and woman.

But it's much, much more than that. The multiple points of view between characters serve to strengthen this novel, showing us just how unique our individual interpretations of events can be. Ultimately, the book makes us wonder just how well we know the thoughts of those whom we love – how well we know those people ... if we really know them at all.

This book is filled with beautiful writing – imagery so crisp and tantalizing you can taste, touch, smell and feel the surroundings. It is also filled with sorrow so palpable you can feel it in your gut. Yet it's not overly sentimentalized. It's pure realism, pulling you through the story from page to page. The topics are heavy, but the plot is engrossing. I recommend this book to anyone who wants depth of characters and a twisting, turning plot filled with suspense, even at the root of its character-driven core.

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## **Candace says**

This review is loaded with spoilers. So if you haven't read the book yet, please do not read on.

\*\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*\*

This is one of those books that makes me feel that, even though I had heterosexual parents and a heterosexual family and grew up in a heterosexual world, I will never understand heterosexuals.

The writing in the book is fine. It's the premise, the plotting, and how it all works out that I find problematic.

They say that the majority of car accidents happen within 25 miles of home. But this book is about two families in the same Cape Code town in which the female partners, independently decided to pack up and take off and travel about three hours -- almost to Hartford -- on the exact same day only to have a major accident facilitated by fog in which one woman lived and the other died. It would be more believable if each woman had travelled, say, three miles before colliding with one another. But no, for some mysterious reason, the collision's improbability had to be cranked to the max.

Now, what could be more improbable than that? How about if the surviving woman became intimately involved with the husband and now-motherless son of the deceased woman's family? Like that happens every day.

We are now somewhere in the win-a-nationwide-lottery realm of improbability, but alas, the surviving woman's affair with the husband of the deceased woman doesn't pan out because, as the author points out, this isn't a Hollywood movie. Huh? WTF? Why the hell not? We are so far into the realm of wishful thinking that it seemed reasonable to me for the childless woman to have a ready-made family fall into her lap.

There seemed to me, too, a bunch of loose ends that never got tied up, but I didn't care much because the entire premise and plot seemed so Byzantine and odd.

And after wading through this plotting morass, I am confronted by a discussion guide, as if I would want to sit around someone's living room and discuss the finer points of this novel.

I'm sure that Leavitt can do better than this. She's obviously talented, but this book makes about as much sense to me as Holly Hunter singing her way through a black neighborhood at night at the end of "Living Out Loud." If you loved that movie, you'll probably love this book. And if you do, could you please explain it to me?

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## **Jennifer says**

Melodramatic, waaay too long and full of unlikable characters. I found pretty much every aspect of the story unbelievable, starting with the aftermath of the wreck and the way people treated Isabelle like a criminal.

The romance between two of the protagonists? Fake and kind of creepy.

The characters very inconsistent. When describing his upbringing, Charlie refers to his parents' chilly, distant relationship, but when we meet those characters 50 pages later they are the wuvy-dovey model of a happy

marriage. (April says her parents are the opposite of Charlie's folks and madly in love; maybe the author forgot who said what in the conversation SHE wrote?)

I hated the nine-year-old who at times acted like he was three and other times like he was 17. I'm not sure Caroline Leavitt has ever met a nine-year-old before.

And WHAT was up with that elementary school? Fourth graders referring to a science teacher? I don't remember having separate subject classes until 7th grade. Kids given all this free time to roam the hallways unsupervised and mess with vending machines? (again: 4th grade. Really?) Worst of all, the kid freakin' LEAVES school in the middle of the day on several occasions and no one says boo.

Lousy. Even Jodi Picoult is better.

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## **Robby says**

This is the second time I have tried to write this review. There is so much I want to say, so many things I want to touch upon, and I don't even know where to begin.

*Pictures of You* was fantastic, beautifully written, beautifully structured, unique and familiar and completely overwhelming. It wasn't flawless, but it was pretty close to it, and Caroline Leavitt has owned her spot on my shelf.

I have been putting off reading this book. I knew it was going to knock me down, and it did, and I read this book slowly and then quickly and finished it in somewhere around a week. I sat in a cabin and looked at the ocean and read a few paragraphs before stopping again. I did this for hours, let the words digest in my stomach. I did this the right way.

*Pictures of You* is about Isabelle Stein and April Nash, two women who meet on strange circumstances and never really meet. The book is not about this at all.

Isabelle is a woman running from her life. She ran when she was a teenager and now she is running again. This time she can't count the reasons on her hand, and she is older, and it is the right thing, and it is what she needs. She knows she deserves better. She is one side of the crash.

April is a woman running from her life, though her story, the whole story, isn't revealed until the end. She is running and then there he is, her son, in the back of the car asking her where they're going. Suddenly things aren't so simple anymore. They were never simple. She is the other side of the crash.

April is killed instantly. Isabelle wakes up in a hospital and no one will tell her what has happened, what she did, or if everyone is alright. And when she does learn the truth, she goes home, and she doesn't come out. This book covers a long period of time, every stage of grieving and then some, and everything that happens after. It covers the grieving that never ends, that open wound no one can see, and Isabelle has dozens of them. Her relationship with Charlie Nash begins this way. They have their grief in common, and they could've known each other any other way, but they didn't. They fall in love. And true to how it always is, Charlie's son Sam gets caught directly in the middle.

*Pictures of You* is about love and grief and coincidence and fate and things that just happen and things we just do and *Pictures of You* is about real people facing real things like Life and having to do it with bravery and strength and still falling flat on their faces. *Pictures of You* is about the human heart.

The writing was beautiful. The book moved slowly, as did the story, but I was patient watching the book unwind, unfold, continuing to see things that hadn't even been there minutes before.

Storylines I never would've expected came up out of nowhere and I found that I wasn't surprised, because they really were there all along. I just wasn't paying attention.

This book had me thinking, about life and love and mistakes we make and grudges we hold, though mostly it

is only against ourselves. If there is one thing about this book that didn't sit well with me it was that the writing felt a little flat at times, but then it would be right back to that top level, to that bar barely anyone can reach, one that Leavitt has a tighter grip on than anything I've seen.

There was so much story, so much plot, and it just kept getting bigger and bigger and better and better and that is realistic. There were so many human feelings that all of the characters had and they were realistic. There were people falling in love and being reckless. There were people learning to forgive themselves. And it worked. And this story is realistic. And Caroline Leavitt is gifted more than I can say.

I loved the imagery. First, the photography. I love photography, pictures, cameras and film and the way holding a camera feels. I have always wanted an old film camera, a Nikon or a Canon that I could run around with. Isabelle gives Sam the inspiration to do just that. And Isabelle takes April's place.

Second, the angels. Sam thinks Isabelle is an angel, sent to him to deliver a message from his mother. He wants to tell people about what happened, about what he saw, but he can't. He loves Isabelle and she takes April's place.

Isabelle was never going to take April's place. She couldn't. But she carved out a new place for herself, and they adapted, and then things changed again and the story took a different path and Caroline Leavitt surprised me again.

I don't know how to wrap this up. Random things I want to say about this book keep popping up into my mind, but I can't keep track of them. I loved this book. I love Caroline Leavitt.

Pictures of You is something to wait for, and it is worth it.

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## **Larry H says**

One foggy day, about three hours from Cape Cod, two women's cars collide on the road. Both appear to be running away from their marriages. April dies in the crash, while Isabelle survives, and is left not only to pick up the pieces of her life in the town she had wanted to escape, but becomes entangled with April's devastated husband, Charlie, and their young son, Sam, who is riddled with guilt about the accident. Charlie can't understand why April wanted to leave, and what she was doing on that road far from home, Sam wants nothing more than to talk to or see his mother one last time, and Isabelle is torn between again wanting to escape and wanting to stay to take care of Charlie and Sam, despite her role in their misery. And as their lives unfold, they realize the impact of every decision, and how sometimes the "best" decision isn't always the right one.

Pictures of You had moments of heartbreaking poignancy and moments when I wanted to shake each one of the characters into action, and both contributed to my enjoyment of the book. No character was drawn to be flawless; at times I sympathized with each of them, and at times I wished someone would just tell them to get a grip. The book definitely exceeded my expectations and surprised me in a number of ways, and that made me happy. And while I am, admittedly, a total sap, it was Caroline Leavitt's well-written story, combined with the emotional power it packs, that kept me reading this book well into the night in order to finish it. Very well done.

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## **Rose says**

Too much like a soap opera; just when you think the drama peaks, here comes another and another... okay, okay enough already! It becomes hard to believe at that point.

Once the relationship starts between Charlie and Isabelle, Leavitt fails to even explore any guilt on Isabelle's part. This was a HUGE oversight as anyone in her shoes would have those feelings; sleeping in Charlie's bed, eating dinner at their table, etc. Another misstep, an overprotective dad with a highly asthmatic young son gives him free rein as a latchkey kid while struggling with the recent death of his mother? Hmmmm....

The book can be summed up in the author's own words (p265), when Isabelle thinks, "I killed a woman. It was an accident. I love the victims. It was an accident."

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### **Leora says**

As a reader who has followed Caroline Leavitt's quiet but extraordinary novels, I can say that this one stands as one of her very best. The fascinating study of relationships, held together by such tenuous threads of fate and circumstance and coincidence, is what makes this novel such a intense and riveting tale. Leavitt can make us think of something sublime, even "divine" in the cracks between the lives of everyday people with just a sweep of words. The "domestic" drama of unremarkable lives becomes the stuff of something grandly human, with far-reaching scope and magnitude. I've seen Leavitt read before and never had such a blast. Cannot wait to see her on her tour with this new one!

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### **Girls Gone Reading says**

Pictures of You fluctuates between several characters, and that can be a tricky thing to do. Somehow Caroline Leavitt does this beautifully. Although Isabella was by far my favorite, both Sam and Charlie were well-rounded and touching.

Leavitt also takes several genres on at once. Pictures of You is mostly a women's literature read, but it does include some mystery and paranormal aspects as well. Women's literature, for me, follows the major decisions that a woman has to make. The novel helps her across some trauma, and main does Isabella have trauma! Isabella faces survivor's guilt and low expectations. She's got this loser husband, and she has huge mother issues. Isabella disappointed me at points, but when she finally turned her life around I wanted to cheer out loud.

April, on the other hand, did not appeal to me at all. I know that I am supposed to feel for the dead wife. I know that I am supposed to think she is/was free spirited. I really only felt like she was annoying, and at the conclusion I felt vindicated.

I really enjoyed Pictures of You, and I am ready to pick up more Caroline Leavitt.

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### **Heather Mize says**

This book was pretty good, but there were several things that I found distracting, and that really frustrate me in a book.

Beware of possible spoilers below:

Sequencing of events, and logistics wasn't always correct. At the end of the book Sam and Lisa meet when



he's 25. They would have been too young to have been practicing on their own. There are probably a dozen or so issues like this in the book.

The book portrays April as an almost overbearing mother, she's so attentive. Other times when convenient for the story Charlie remembers her a different way. In the book it refers to Charlie not being able to cook, but then later Sam is looking back and refers to him baking loaves of bread. There were SO many examples of this that it annoyed me. To me, that's simply editing issues.

The story gets a little convoluted, and it seems to be lacking some serious issues that would have come up between Charlie and Isabelle. Isabelle becomes very co-dependent, and their reactions to their first time together seem implausible. Isabelle loves Sam, yet she does become needy, obsessive, and utterly selfish when asking them to move. She is very forceful. But once her relationship with Charlie develops it's as if the story line of her own guilt and role in April's death is diminished. There were a lot of loose threads. Not exactly questions unanswered, but just things that didn't make sense. It lacked in some ways, and had to much included in more ways.

Luke seems easily to let go of Isabelle easily after ramming himself down her throat. There's missing dialogue sometimes- she never asks Luke to explain his infidelity, etc. The book doesn't explore the first holidays of Charlie and Sam w/o April. It glides past important things. The detective who was only hired for 1 month is still working with Charlie months later. No closure to Teddy and his abuse. Why did Isabelle sleep with Charlie when she was pregnant? It seemed a little hypocritical after Charlie just having told her of his conversation with Bill, and her own past with Luke. It didn't add any value to the characters. It made me like them less. Why did Leavitt even include Charlie overhearing his dad on the phone saying Darling to a woman? It didn't add to the story and was never mentioned again.

Why would April leave Sam when she's portrayed as overbearing and overly attentive?

Again, just some things that to me seem implausible. There's a lot of rear view mirror scenes, and cliches. A lot of happenstance and convenience- lots of running into each other.

Last but not least the characters were not very diverse. Charlie, April, and Isabelle's parents almost all have the same relationship dynamics (though Isabelle's dad is dead and April's are now too.) However, even this is sketchy. Charlie refers early on to a tense household and his parents fighting. Then later he refers to them as being so wound in each other that he felt like an outsider. Then later he refers to their relationship as chilling again.

It really isn't a bad story I just get super annoyed with so many inconsistencies, as well as I feel like Leavitt struggled with an ending she felt good with and the story spiraled a little at the end.

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## **Anne says**

It is a very foggy day as April and Isabelle, unknown to each other, leave their homes on Cape Cod. Three hours later, the fog is worse. April, standing outside her car, suddenly looms up before Isabelle. Isabelle

cannot stop or turn her car in time to avoid a horrible accident which kills April. This compelling story follows Isabelle, Charlie, April's husband, and Sam, April's 9 year-old son, as their lives become intertwined while they deal with the aftermath of that accident. I couldn't put it down.

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