



If I Should Lose You

Natasha Lester

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‘Through a cast of memorable characters, If I Should Lose You pitches art against life, and in the process exposes life in all its frailties. Here is a story that resonates long after reading.’ — Andrea Goldsmith

‘I was captivated by this honest, beautiful story that fuses love and art with the most profound challenges of motherhood. Written with extraordinary emotional wisdom and intelligence.’ — Liz Byrski

Camille is a nurse specialising in supporting families through the difficult decision to donate the organs of their dying loved ones. Camille’s mother is a gifted but uncompromising transplant surgeon determined to make it in a man’s world until her own life falls apart. And Camille herself is a mother to Addie – five years old, critically ill and in desperate need of the very organs her mother and grandmother work with.

If I Should Lose You Details

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From Reader Review If I Should Lose You for online ebook

Sara says

Addie is three years old, and desperately needs a new liver. Her mother, Camille, is used to dealing with the relatives of organ donors through her work at the hospital, but this is something altogether different. Caught in the nightmare of a critically ill child, Camille's emotions begin to splinter, her marriage is tested to the point of fracture, and in her desperation to save Addie she is forced to question where the boundaries of her own morality lie.

One of the only distractions for Camille is the opportunity to curate a retrospective of her father's sculptures. But as she compiles the notes for this exhibition, she is also drawn back into the lives of her parents, who both died when Camille was young. Her mother Alix had been one of the first female heart surgeons in Australia, but the details of her death have always been indistinct to Camille. As she learns more about her mother and father's relationship, Addie's condition continues to worsen, and the family begin a heart-wrenching wait to see if a donor will be found in time.

I was a big fan of Natasha's first book *What is Left Over, After*, which won the TAG Hungerford prize, and I have been looking forward to reading *If I Should Lose You* for quite some time. In this poignant story, one person's death might offer the chance of life for another. With tremendous emotional acuity, Natasha explores the complex contradictions of what this means in a world that is at once wretched, beautiful, agonising and sublime. The narrative deals with the many responses to loss, and the meanings we ascribe to our bodies, which both represent and hinder the essence of us. It is a book that draws you in on so many levels, and will leave you questioning, What if the unthinkable happened to our family? How would I react, and who might I become?

Bree T says

Camille is a nurse specialising in transplant medicine. She is the one that provides all of the information about donating organs to the families and loved ones of people who no longer need them. It's a difficult job – speaking to a person about the use of someone's organs when they're at their most vulnerable can provoke a wide range of reactions including hostility and hysteria.

Camille is also mother to three year old Addie who has biliary atresia, a disease of the liver. Addie has been very sick for a long time and it's getting to the crucial stage now – she requires a liver and she requires one very soon if she is to survive. Camille helps many people with the decision of organ donation but she cannot help her own daughter. Instead she must watch and wait – and pray. Pray for the unthinkable to happen to someone else's child so that her child might live.

In her spare time between shifts at work and shifts at the hospital sitting with Addie, Camille is coordinating an art exhibition of art devoted to her mother. Camille's mother Alix was a heart transplant surgeon who loved two men – one who worked in plaster sculpture the other a painter and both dedicated many works to her. Working on the art show is therapeutic for Camille – it allows her to open her mind to the woman she knows so little about, her own mother and it gives her a creative outlet in a time of chaos as she waits for the news that might save her daughter's life.

About a week or two ago I watched a vlog by Australian author Natasha Lester talking about the books she's read for the month. I love hearing people talk about the books they've been reading and ended up adding several of them to my TBR list. I requested them from my local library and grabbed her own book while I was at it. It interested me because several years ago at my brother's wedding, I met a little boy with biliary atresia and through my brother and his wife, have followed his progress on facebook and through local newspaper reports as his situation got progressively worse and his need for a transplant grew. In December of 2013, he got his much needed gift and only days before reading this book, I read an article about how he has recovered from that transplant and what outcome his life has now and how he is learning to basically live as a child again. It's a really lovely story that so far has a good outcome, an outcome I wasn't sure would be replicated in this book.

If I had to think of two words to describe this book, it would be raw and honest. Camille works two days a week as a transplant coordinator, helping guide people through the decision making process of donating organs. And while she does this, her own daughter who is just a toddler, edges ever closer to being at the point on the list where a transplant is critical. At one stage, Addie is number 2 on the list and then becomes first. Camille knows it's because the child that was first on the list, no longer requires the organ. The two options are they already got one or they died before one became available – and it's most likely the latter. Camille has to hope for horrible, terrible things so that her daughter might live. She prays for an accident, a child hitting her head, etc. Something that renders their brain function dead but perfectly preserves the rest of their body and the precious organ inside that Addie so desperately needs. The scenes in this book where Addie is in the hospital after vomiting blood are heartbreaking. I have a child not much younger than Addie and I found myself attempting to imagine how it would feel if I were Camille and it were my son that was so ill in hospital. How we would coordinate shifts spending time with him (we don't have family here to help out by taking shifts at the hospital or looking after our older son) and how I'd feel desperately waiting. Camille voices the thoughts I'm sure most parents in her situation would have, even if only during the darkest times. I found her honesty as refreshing as it was horrifying but I could understand it. She sees death every day and I think she has sort of become immune to it on some levels, it's the way that organs are found. It isn't until very late in the story that she seems to realise the horror that another parent will have to go through in order for her not to experience it.

The relationship between Paul and Camille is brutally honest as well. They've been doing the rounds of a sick child for a long time now and it's taken a toll on their marriage, especially as they deal with Addie's sickness in different ways and Camille sees Paul's way as not even being affected by it. She has disdain for him at times, but there are other times when they connect in different ways. They also have a younger daughter as well who needs to be cared for and cherished and I imagine that this is a very difficult thing to balance when one child needs you so much and yet you have another as well. Rosie is younger than Addie, only 18m and even though Camille only works part time, at times it is very much a difficult load to juggle.

The story of Camille's mother Alix and her two lovers, Camille's father and the man she met after he died, was less interesting to me but I really did like the heart transplant information in Alix's scenes when she was working. Given Camille's career, it was good to see what happens to the organ after it's harvested, the scenarios that are successful and the ones that are not. I'd have liked a little bit more about that in the story! But mostly it was Camille's journey that captivated me here – it is a very powerful story.

Karen ?🌸 says

I've been sitting on this review not really knowing what to write.

The book explores the very difficult topic of organ donation from the viewpoint of a coordinating Nurse in the hospital (who talks to the families and tries to provide them with information to make a decision about donation), who also happens to be a mother with a terminally ill child in need of a liver donation. Understandably, the Nurse's family is under stress and her marriage is breaking apart.

The book is well written with respect given for this very difficult subject matter. It was at times full of hope, but also despair and disappointment. I think what I like about Lester's style is that she doesn't tell the reader what to think or feel. We are provided with information about a situation and left to our own pondering. It makes for a novel that has you thinking well after you have finished reading.

Dawn says

This novel tells the story of Camille, a transplant coordinator, in the midst of a family crisis. While she wrestles with her daughter's illness and failing marriage, she also begins to organise an art exhibition that forces her to confront the story of her own mother, Alix, a heart surgeon, and Alix's two partners: Camille's father, and her second partner, Jack. These parts of the story are cleverly woven in as a separate thread as Camille prepares 'Notes on an exhibition'.

This is Natasha Lester's second novel. I was prompted to read it as she is appearing at the 2013 Perth Writer's Festival, and I'm so pleased that I did. It is beautifully written with rich, poetic language, and I think Natasha's big strength is her ability to capture the intricacies of relationships: husband and wife; mother and infant; mother and daughter. In many ways, these parts of the book are its main strength. Some of the scenes involving a depressed mother and infant were incredibly touching and realistic. These raise questions about Alix's mental health and personality, and the effect that this has had on Camille and her own coping strategies.

It's probably fair to say that the two main female characters are difficult to like at times: the way they cope with the traumas in their lives can make them seem harsh, particularly Camille's mother, Alix. But this in itself is what's interesting about the book and raises it above a typical family drama: the characters are complex and realistic and make you question your own emotional responses.

This is a complex, emotional and beautiful book. Highly recommended.

Helen McKenna says

Camille is the daughter of one of Australia's first female transplant surgeons and has herself forged a career as a nurse, working with the families of potential organ donors. Besides that, she is the mother of two young girls, one who is in desperate need of a liver transplant.

Poignant and compelling, this book explores an uncomfortable reality of organ donation - when those waiting for an organ essentially have to hope for the death of another so they might live. Beautifully written with lyrical, flowing prose you cannot help but feel Camille's despair as she watches her daughter grow sicker while trying to nurture her other child and deal with a less than loving marriage.

Interwoven into the medical storyline is a subplot where Camille has been invited to oversee an exhibition of

her late father's sculptures. Reading her mother's diaries, Camille comes to learn more of her parents who both died when she was young. Some of the truths revealed in the pages are honest and shocking, leaving Camille with more things to grapple with in her already complex and stressful existence.

On a separate note, I thought the medical information within this story was accurately presented with great skill. It is never easy to include a lot of technical information within a story, but the author has folded it in seamlessly without detracting from the emotional content of the book.

Haunting and honest, *If I Should Lose You* is a thought provoking novel that explores multiple themes and challenges many ideas on life, death and parenthood.

Steve Daykin says

This book swept me up from its opening paragraph. Whenever I picked it up I found it hard to put down again. The novel took me into the world of organ transplanting and donating, and deepened my appreciation of it.

Kerran Olson says

4.5 Another beautifully written book from Natasha Lester, this one dealing with the complexities of organ donation, heart surgery, and of course, the heart. Love, loss, grief, all are explored so eloquently and presented in such a raw, vulnerable way. I really liked how Camille's story is interwoven with that of her mother Alix through exhibition notes as Camille curates the artworks both her father and Alix's lover created. It was also interesting the way the process of heart surgery and organ transplants were explored.

Now I've read all of Natasha's previous works and am eagerly awaiting her next novel!

Lisa says

The rather girly cover is misleading. It isn't light reading, not the sort of light-hearted book I had in mind when I packed it for my trip. It is a soul-searching and painfully honest book, exploring fundamental issues of love, loss, guilt and medical ethics.

To read the rest of my review, please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2012/08/28/if...>

PS I'm sorry this review isn't more detailed, I was away in Russia at the time of reading it and I didn't have time to write as much as I would have liked.

Monique Mulligan says

An intricately woven story of two mothers, *If I Should Lose You* by Natasha Lester is a story that will stay

with readers not only because of its wisdom, but because of the questions it raises.

See full review at <http://www.writenotereviews.com/g-il...>

Wendy says

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway thanks to the generosity of the author and publishers. I enjoyed the mix of motherhood, art and love together with the struggles of working with sick children and hospital visits.

Melissa says

So, you know that phrase "Don't judge a book by its cover"? Well first look at this cover, I thought the book would be a lighthearted story- as someone as mentioned in the previous comments. However this book is far from a lighthearted story, it is a very emotional and heartfelt story, with the reader left pondering after finishing the books. I really liked the book overall, besides from the fact that I felt kind of sad afterwards.

Simone says

If I Should Lose You is a beautifully written, moving story dealing with the difficult subject of organ donation. Camille is a nurse who helps families of donors through the process, while her own daughter is battling a life threatening illness (requiring a liver transplant).

This is a multi-layered story that also explores the relationship Camillie's parents shared. Although both tragically died young, through the reading of her mother's diaries, Camille comes to learn more about them - yet much of the information imparted is shocking and not easy to deal with. Adding to this stress, Camille's marriage is in difficulty, a casualty of the many balls she has to juggle.

Easy to read but not an easy read, If I Should Lose You was a book that I simply couldn't put down - each sentence pulling me further into the storyline and ultimately leaving an impression on me as a reader.

Annabel Smith says

This beautifully written book explores the issues surrounding organ donation from several perspectives: firstly the medical staff whose job is to persuade the families of 'braindead' people to donate their loved one's organs, secondly, those who actually perform the transplants, and finally, the family of a little girl who desperately needs a liver transplant.

The novel took me into a world I've never encountered, and opened my mind to the myriad issues surrounding the entire process of organ donation. I did not know, for example, that though I am a registered organ donor, it would still be up to my husband whether or not to donate my organs if I died. I had never considered what it would be like for him, if, for example, an accident rendered me braindead, to have to let me be wheeled into surgery to have my organs 'harvested'. Or, worse still, how the families of those on organ

transplant waiting lists might actually pray for another child to die, so that theirs might live.

The narrative thread of Addie's wait for a new liver and the strain this places on her parents' marriage is interspersed with the story of Camille's mother, and the two men she loved, both artists. Though Camille's mother's story has its own share of tragedy, it is wonderfully romantic and thus provides some welcome relief from the intensity of Addie's story.

Lester's novel tackles the big questions of life and death in a very compelling way, but it also just as convincingly depicts the more easily relatable realm of marriage and parenthood. A confronting and thought-provoking read.

Renee says

If I Could Lose You was not a book I devoured in one sitting, it was a novel that I nibbled on, savouring each mouthful. Natasha's writing style is beautifully descriptive and engaging without being overwritten. Told from the point of view of a nurse, the story tackled life and death in that slightly detached way that those in the medical profession develop in order to cope. It was emotionally engaging and thought provoking, but not in an exhausting rollercoaster way. I loved the way Natasha wove together tales of past and present, art and medicine, love and loss. The novel discussed organ transplants from the perspective of the surgical team, the donor and their family, and the recipient and their family, prompting me to have a discussion with my husband about organ donation.

This is the first book I've read by Natasha Lester and I'm looking forward to reading more.

Meg says

3.5
