



The Saddler Boys

Fiona Palmer

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Schoolteacher Natalie has always been a city girl. She has a handsome boyfriend and a family who give her only the best. But she craves her own space, and her own classroom, before settling down into the life she is expected to lead.

When Nat takes up a posting at a tiny school in remote Western Australia, it proves quite the culture shock, but she is soon welcomed by the swarm of inquisitive locals, particularly young student Billy and his intriguing single father, Drew.

As Nat's school comes under threat of closure, and Billy's estranged mother turns up out of the blue, Nat finds herself fighting for the township and battling with her heart. Torn between her life in Perth and the new community that needs her, Nat must risk losing it all to find out what she's really made of – and where she truly belongs.

PRAISE FOR FIONA PALMER

'Fiona Palmer just keeps getting better.' **Rachael Johns**

'Palmer's passion for the land bleeds into the story, and her scenes are vivid and genuine, just as her characters are.' ***Book'd Out***

'Fiona Palmer has well and truly earned her place as a leading writer of one of Australia's much-loved genres.' ***Countryman***

The Saddler Boys Details

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From Reader Review The Saddler Boys for online ebook

Jemma (Aussie BookWorm) says

L O V E D I T ! Full Review + Author Q&A here: <http://aussiebookworm.weebly.com/palm...>

Faye says

I loved this book, it was a romance which is not normally my genre, but a friend gave me a big lot of books and it sounded interesting, I would read this author again. It was the right amount of romance, and a half decent story line. Also Aussie Author.

Margi says

This was a delightful rural romance that had me drawn in from the 1st page. I really enjoyed this novel. I needed a good easy read during what was a very busy festive season and this hit the spot.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

The Saddler Boys is another delightfully engaging rural romance from Australian author Fiona Palmer.

Natalie Wright is excited about taking up her first teaching position in the remote farming community of Lake Biddy, and is determined to make the most of a years freedom from her parent's expectations. Welcomed by the locals despite her city ways Nat quickly falls in love with Lake Biddy and her adorable young charges, particularly shy and sweet Billy Saddler.

The development of the relationship between Natalie and single dad Drew Saddler is charming. It begins as a friendship sparked by Billy's admiration for Nat, and her interest in understanding what farming entails but the attraction between the two is quickly evident, even as they both try to deny it. The relationship is of course complicated by Natalie's engagement to Gary, whose character contrasts sharply with Drew's.

Additional drama develops as the government announces its intention to shut down Lake Biddy primary school, Billy's mother, who abandoned him as a newborn reappears demanding contact with her son, and Gary grows increasingly impatient with Natalie's desire for independence. These subplots all add a frisson of tension to the story, and depth by touching on topical issues such as regional school closures, drug abuse, and domestic violence.

While I really liked the wonderful characterisations of Natalie, Drew and Billy, I also loved the authentic feeling of community Palmer evokes in The Saddler Boys as the residents rally against the school closure and attend the raucous P&C fundraisers. She captures the generosity of country neighbours as Doris drops off Tupperware containers full of food, and friends trade babysitting duties during harvest and seeding.

Written with warmth, humour and spirit, *The Saddler Boys* is an lovely read about belonging, family, and love.

Melissa (Mel's Bookshelf) says

FINALLY!!! Its taken quite a lot of books to get there, but here we are, *The Saddler Boys*... A romance worthy of 4 stars!! Absolutely delightful!

So city girl Nat is from an affluent Perth family and has just finished training to be a teacher. She excitedly moves out to a small town in the middle of Western Australia called Lake Biddy (A real place, I checked!) to become the new school teacher. She has a few reasons for going. She is pretty much scarily obsessed with teaching, and she wants to show her parents that she can do it, as well as her city boyfriend. She also wants to be by herself for a while before she has to deal with the pressures of her life, marriage, children etc etc... She starts teaching at the local school and starts to develop a friendship with Drew, one of her students fathers. Oh and he just happens to be drop dead gorgeous and available... Attempting to ignore the ever growing sparks and tension between them, she deals with the split between her city life and her "perfect" boyfriend, and the new home she has found at Lake Biddy. Meanwhile Drew's ex is back and wants to be involved in their sons life even though she has never met him, and thinks take a dramatic turn.

I thought this was a lovely book. Considering I am an Australian, I don't read many Australian authors... Especially those books set in outback Australia. For some reason I avoid them. I find that it usually doesn't interest me. However this book has made me think again and has perhaps made me a bit more open to trying more Australian authors and books set in Australia.

Palmer's writing is so easy to read and flowed almost flawlessly. She actually had me enthralled from the first few chapters which I wasn't expecting. I am already looking into reading some of her earlier work.

I enjoyed that although it was a romance, it had other aspects of it. It had quite a lot of drama. The relationship between Nat and her boyfriend Gary took a turn I was not expecting and I found I was glued to the book and finished the whole thing in one sitting! Drew's ex coming into the picture was a pivotal part of the story and also had me captivated, especially towards the end.

The characters were great. I was expecting Nat to be prissy and more annoying, but she was well written and I found myself liking her a lot. Drews little boy Billy I thought was adorable. And Drew... What a dreamboat!!! When I first read that he was dashingely handsome with a great body and a winning personality I admit I did roll my eyes a little bit, but his character had a great depth that I really enjoyed.

Ok, sure it was predictable... Its a romance, they are meant to be. Ultimately you know what's going to happen at the end, but the ride was extremely enjoyable and a lot of unexpected things did happen to make up for it!

The ending I found to be a tiny little bit of an anti-climax. A little bit of a let down. But I did love the budding tension between Nat and Drew throughout the book. At times I felt it dragged on slightly, and that along with the disappointing ending was probably the reason I gave it 4 stars instead of 5.

Would I recommend it?

Absolutely, it was great!

Many thanks to Penguin via NetGalley for the advanced copy in exchange for an honest review.

For more reviews visit my blog at

www.booksbabiesbeing.com

Find me on twitter

www.twitter.com/BBB_Mel

Brenda says

When twenty two year old Natalie Wright arrived in the little town of Lake Biddy, population not quite three hundred, for her posting as teacher, she had no idea how remote the area was. Travelling from her home city of Perth, she was escaping the constant demands of her parents who expected her to marry, settle down and have children. But Natalie wanted to spread her wings; do her own thing for a while; and indulge in her love of teaching when everyone was against it. Even her boyfriend Gary didn't approve of her plan.

Settling in to her little house just up the road from the tiny school, she knew she was going to love the experience. And getting to know the children; the excited little faces that beamed at her on the first day of term – she felt happy, content; this was what she wanted. From the small staff to the locals – everyone was friendly. Within days Nat felt welcomed; the love of community was strong; she could sense it.

Amongst her students was Billy – quiet, curious yet withdrawn; he had Nat intrigued. He was an adorable child and when she met his father Drew, she knew there were some secrets hidden under his strong and handsome farmer's exterior. Her gradual knowledge of Billy's estranged mother formed some of the answers. But when the community was notified of the government's decision to close Lake Biddy's only school, they were incensed. How could they do that? The next school was over an hour away by bus – the children would suffer; the town would suffer. The fight was on...

Suddenly though danger loomed. Would Billy be safe? What would happen with Drew? And would the community be able to save their small school – the life hub of Lake Biddy? Nat felt anguish – her love of the small town and its locals had eaten into her heart...

Aussie author Fiona Palmer has another winner with *The Saddler Boys* in my opinion. A great tale of a struggling rural community and the way the lives of locals and farmers in the surrounding areas are affected. This one is a thoroughly enjoyable rural novel, with a smattering of romance, great family ties and a huge amount of loyalty. Highly recommended.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publishers for my copy to read and review.

Sheree says

My first time reading Fiona Palmer, surprising, since I'm actually familiar with a few of her titles. Anyway, not only was this a delightful rural romance with wonderfully endearing characters, *The Saddler Boys* has

substance, highlighting topical issues of domestic violence, single parenting, rural school closures and small town viability.

Set in the actual town of Lake Biddy in Western Australia, 22 year old Nat leaves her family and boyfriend Greg in Perth to take up her first teacher's posting at the small country school. While unfamiliar with remote rural life, she's enthusiastic, genuine about embracing the experience and she's warmly welcomed by the locals ...

None more so than 8 year old student Billy who blossoms under Nat's instruction and compassionate nature. My heart melted at the first mention of little Billy and when we learn of his Nana's death from metastatic melanoma, I was undone. My boys had a beautiful bond with their Nana who died from Melanoma 7 years ago.

Palmer's passion for the rural landscape is vivid on the page, farming, shearing, seeding, P&C fundraisers, the genuine sense of community, neighbourly generosity and compassion. I loved that almost as much as I loved the bond developing between Nat and the Saddler boys, Billy and hardworking single dad, Drew. The Saddler boys, big and little won my heart!

Family, friendship, love and community with a thoroughly authentic Australian flavour.

PattyMacDotComma says

4.5★for a satisfying rural romance

First – the prologue introduces us to a mysterious woman, spying on a school bus, looking for “her” boy.

Next – we meet the beautiful, silk-clad Miss Natalie Wright arriving at a dusty country petrol station. She has her Gucci tote and is driving her twenty-first birthday present, a “*Monte Carlo blue BMW*” in the middle of nowhere - well, as good as nowhere – Lake Biddy, WA.

Exactly what she’s looking for – an escape from her Perth parents and her handsome, but patronising, older boyfriend Gary and their expectations. Only her favourite rellie, down-to-earth Uncle Kent, encourages her. She wants to have a crack at living on her own and teaching in a small town, so small, that she drove straight out the other side.

Stopping for fuel, she notices a man in the shop at the petrol station. *“He was tall and cute. A real-life handsome farmer. This one wasn’t like the two older guys behind her with scruffy hair and worn clothes. Well, actually, this one did have messy, blond-tipped hair and he wore boots but his face was gorgeous. Something you’d normally see in a fireman calendar, with dirt smudged on his tan skin. His deep sapphire eyes found hers, he smiled, she smiled back and then he walked straight past her out the door.”*

Well. Hmph!

Everyone else certainly notices and admires the new schoolteacher, of course, and she progresses from Miss Wright, to Natalie, to Nat, to Natty, and finally at the Bogan Bingo night, to Nazza (which is thankfully short-lived). The townsfolk warm to her, the kids love her, and she settles happily into her school routine and

her tiny house with pet chooks and some hand-me-down farm clothes.

I've been a property-owner and can testify to the author's realistic portrayal of the dust, the mud, the sheep, the work, (and the fun), and the reality that, on a farm, the definition of 'visitor' is 'free labour'. Sure, you can help – just grab this and get started!

And Nat does. She also discovers the delight of a well-earned cold beer with a mate on a shady veranda after a hot, hard day in the shearing shed. She becomes more and more reluctant to go home to Perth to hear her mother's digs: *"Darling it's so good to see you. Have you been using your moisturiser? Your skin looks dry. It's that bush heat and sun."* And she's uncomfortable with Gary's increasing possessiveness when she doesn't jump to his call.

Nat explains that Lake Biddy's got lots going on– shearing, seeding, harvesting – and an active community trying to save the tiny school. She's just trying to help, particularly one of her students, Billy Saddler, a troubled, shy boy, whose adored grandmother recently died, leaving him alone, grieving with his single dad, Drew.

The Saddler boys have extended family and friends, but they are all busy farm families, so can't always help. And Drew's just a mate. (Mind you, Drew is the aforementioned fireman-calendar-material man.)

Gary's having none of it, and when he starts to exercise his authority, and when the mysterious woman we met in the prologue reappears, Nat begins questioning all of her priorities.

It's well-written, authentic, and fun, with believable characters. For example, Nat goes to Drew's farm to help with shearing (he does his own).

"The first thing that hit her was the smell. It was like nothing she'd ever experienced – unless you counted the time she'd been stuck behind a truck carrying sheep. Then there was an oil scent of some sort. Her nose twitched, and when her eyes adjusted she stepped inside. A machine that was running the shearing stuff was making a loud noise, and music was coming from an iPod dock on the opposite wall."

And that's exactly what a woolshed smells and sounds like, except my time was before iPods, so it was radios blasting out the local station.

As part of a 'challenge' to step outside my usual reading material, I chose this rural romance, courtesy of NetGalley and Penguin Australia. Thanks to both for a happy reintroduction to the genre. I enjoyed this trip to country WA. I'll be back, and I'm sure others will, too.

Amy (Lost in a Good Book) says

A big reason why I had a hard time enjoying this was the narrator of the audiobook; she made Natalie sound like a constantly cheery childish girl which was annoying. I know she was meant to be 22, but it changed my perspective of her when she sounded so innocent and naive all the time even when she wasn't meant to. I had read the first few chapters in a physical book and was really engaged, I think switching to audio changed my enjoyment in part.

There were good parts that I enjoyed, Palmer portrays the country lifestyle well and the characters were interesting. Some parts were predictable but I was surprised by other parts. It was a nice wholesome story that touched on some more serious topics. Even when it did that it didn't feel as serious though, maybe that was because of how it was read too, I don't know.

Palmer includes a few different dramas, a few I felt had to be there because it gave Natalie more justification for her decisions rather than a believable character choice. I think a different approach would have been better. But for the most part, I enjoyed the different dynamics, young single father, a child with a few special needs, interesting supporting characters. It worked well on that front.

I was surprised by the ending, I was waiting for a sudden change but Palmer followed through which was impressive. Overall it's not the best rural story I have read, but it wasn't too bad either. I'm almost tempted to reread it as a book just to see if I enjoy it more...almost.

This review was published on my blog <https://wp.me/p3x8rS-1yF>

Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

Popular Australian rural fiction novelist Fiona Palmer has a great set collection of novels under her belt. While eagerly waiting her latest (Sisters and Brothers is out very soon) to hit bookstores, I realised I had not read an older title (released 2015) by Palmer lingering on my TBR shelf. The particular night I turned to *The Saddler Boys* I was in need of the warm comfort of a rural fiction novel. I knew that *The Saddler Boys*, or any novel written by Fiona Palmer would give me exactly what I needed. In *The Saddler Boys*, I was welcomed with a rural fiction storyline which was a close to my heart. It features a narrative based on the life of a freshly graduated teacher from the city making her country teaching debut. As a primary school teacher myself I immediately formed a connection to Natalie, the central figure of this novel. Palmer does a very good job of setting her scene, both highlighting the issues at stake in a local community dealing with possible school closure, through to agonising scenes of domestic violence, child abandonment, drug abuse and custody rights. This is entwined with an overarching arc about Natalie, a young teacher coping with a new life in the country. Natalie is determined to succeed, despite the odds that are stacked up against her. *The Saddler Boys* is a novel composed of romance, friendship, career aspirations, balancing a family and livelihood, farming pressures and the diminishing rate of small town resources. *The Saddler Boys* demonstrates why Fiona Palmer is one of my boomerang authors, I keep coming back for more, time and time again! *The Saddler Boys* represents an excellent declaration to the plight of small town schools up and down our country.

The Saddler Boys, is book #106 of the Australian Women Writers Challenge

Bree T says

Natalie is definitely not what the locals would be expecting when she rolls into town in her cute little sports car with her designer clothes and high heels. She's clearly from a very different world but Natalie has come to Lake Biddy, population less than 300 in Western Australia, to take up a position at the small local school. She's very passionate about her job and she cannot wait to meet her young students and get started. Nat's

enthusiasm and energy for her job and the way that she builds a rapport with her young charges as well as her friendliness and willingness to be involved in the local community quickly wins over the residents.

The Saddler Boys packs a lot in between its covers – it's not just a rural romance. Palmer tackles some issues close to a rural community's heart as the school Natalie has come to work at faces closure by the government due to lack of numbers, which will mean longer bus rides for the children to nearby, bigger towns with schools. The community bands together to protest the closure and Natalie becomes heavily involved as they campaign to save it. Despite the connection Natalie has made with local single father Drew, and the time they are spending together, she has a boyfriend in the city. She finds herself torn between the life she always envisaged with her boyfriend, who comes from a family very close to her own, but it's a life that since she moved to Lake Biddy, has become somewhat suffocating. Natalie finds herself patronised by her boyfriend and wondering if he really is all that she had thought him to be. In contrast, time spent with Drew is easy as she learns more and more about country life, helping with shearing and minding Billy, Drew's son while Drew seeds new crops on the farm. She fits in and she's one of the first people Drew turns to when he feels that Billy may be in danger. I got a good idea of what it might be like to be a single parent and a farmer as well as how closures of things like schools can really affect tiny communities.

I loved the ease of Natalie and Drew's friendship and the way Palmer took time to nurture it. Drew is well aware Natalie has a boyfriend and the two of them are mindful of boundaries but at the same time, really enjoy spending time with each other and want it to continue. I really enjoyed the glimpses into Drew's head that writing in the third person allowed Palmer to give the reader and he's always much more honest about his feelings for Natalie to himself than she is to herself about him, still confused by the complication of her boyfriend. Drew and Natalie fit together very well, despite their very different backgrounds and lifestyles and all of their scenes together are so well done that you become very invested in them getting it together already. Natalie is perfect with Billy, Drew's young son who is perhaps a little different, and who requires a little more than most students would. He's an interesting child and I enjoyed the part of the story concerning him and how it all played out. Children are often hard to place within a book that has romance and it's difficult to get that authenticity but I feel as though this was definitely one of the book's strong points.

I love a good rural story – even though I don't live in the country myself, they're just so familiar and comforting, they're the perfect things for me to read when I'm distracted and stressed because I can slip into the story so easily. This was exactly what I needed and I'd recommend it not only to fans of the genre but also those who haven't yet tried it yet. It's got enough going on to satisfy any reader.

Carol - Reading Writing and Riesling says

My View:

Recently I have been reading a few "How to Write" type books and one piece of advice I see repeatedly offered is "write about what you know." Fiona Palmer is an expert at this, her love of the county, in particular the Western Australian wheat belt, its small towns and the people who inhabit these towns, shines in her books, this one is no exception.

Fiona's love of the land is evident in every word, every sentence of this exceptional narrative; there are vivid scenes of sheep and shearing sheds, you can almost smell the lanolin, hear the buzz of the clippers, picture the farm/work ute and see yourself catching yabbies in the dam... I think this narrative works so well because you can so easily place yourself in the settings, the images are so alive.

Juxtaposed against the images of country life dictated by the seasons, a lifestyle built on community is the busyness and sterility of the city, Nat's parents particularly showcase a world devoted to appearances, image, the creation of wealth, a world devoid of emotion. Uncle Kent is the exception in this city environment; a character that demonstrates that wealth and caring can go hand in hand.

Fiona Palmer's writing is has depth and successfully tackles many contemporary issues – the demise of the small country town, the disproportionate number of males to females in country towns and the social implications of this factor, the closing of schools when numbers aren't deemed viable and the negative domino effect this has on the rest of the community (the closing of the local shop, people moving to areas where there are a greater range of services etc.) domestic violence, custody battles... there is so much packed into this book.

This is an exceptional book; Fiona Palmer has created a country town that the reader can step into, a place where the characters are people you know and love (mostly), a place where family and community matter and woven into this rural scene are real and current issues. Fiona Palmer has successfully and engagingly written about what she knows best.

Jill says

'The Saddler Boys' by Fiona Palmer was a sweet story of city-bred Natalie and her experiences at a small school in a remote rural community in Western Australia. All the characters are engaging and the story unfolds slowly yet surely. Some worthwhile comments on single parenting, abuse, community living, and being yourself. A little predictable, and of course Drew the farmer is devastatingly handsome and Natalie is flawlessly beautiful.

Nicole says

The Saddler Boys is my first book by Aussie rural author, Fiona Palmer. Its perfect if you're looking for a quick and easy read, which I was. However, the story line was a little too predictable and country life too perfect to be believable. Nat is the privileged city slicker who decides to pack it all in for a life in the country, leaving behind her wonderful boyfriend. As soon as she arrives, Nat meets the local hottie and single father, Drew. Naturally everyone warms to the new teacher, welcoming her with open arms. There is no need for Nat to adjust her expectations or suffer loneliness that can result from moving. She slots right into country life, even with the school being under threat of closure. For such a serious issue, I was disappointed at the lack of depth. Life becomes slightly less rosy for Nat personally when her boyfriend's jealousy becomes physical. This is never an easy thing to read about but even so I knew where this would go. Add in the local hottie and you could write Nat's ending yourself.

Carolyn says

This is a delightful rural romance set in the small outback WA town of Lake Biddy. Natalie is a newly minted teacher who wants to enjoy a year teaching in a small town and living on her own before being

subsumed by her wealthy family into the life she is expected to lead as a wife and mother. She immediately falls in love with the country, the kids and the people in the town. She strikes up a friendship with the Saddler boys, Billy a youngster in her class and his single Dad Drew who are more than eager to teach her about country life. Although she has a boyfriend in Perth, she starts finding more excuses not to go back home each weekend and gradually becomes a part of local life.

You can tell that Fiona Palmer loves the Australian outback as she writes about it and its people so well. She really understands not only the stark beauty of the landscape but also the country way of life and the big personalities that it tends to generate. Even though we have a feeling that we know where this story is going from the moment we open the first page there is plenty of interest with the events and characters in the novel to keep us turning the pages and there some surprises along the way. A very satisfying read indeed.

With thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for an ecopy of this book to read and review
