



Last Lessons of Summer

Margaret Maron

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In this dark and suspenseful departure from her critically acclaimed Judge Deborah Knott series, award-winning author Maron follows a young publisher's search for answers to old murders, which leads her to the darkest secrets of her family's past.

Last Lessons of Summer Details

Date : Published August 1st 2004 by Grand Central Publishing (first published January 1st 2003)

ISBN : 9780446614221

Author : Margaret Maron

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, Adult Fiction, Cozy Mystery, Adult, Suspense, American, Southern, Audiobook

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From Reader Review Last Lessons of Summer for online ebook

Kathleen says

Published in 2003 before I began following Margaret Maron's book series, this stand-alone southern mystery includes a large, extended family, some jealous of others' good fortunes and riches, and others, still working hard on their farms, and a protagonist whom people greatly underestimate. Times are changing in North Carolina; developers are interested in buying up property for highway and shopping mall expansions. Family members are getting too old to work their farms, many are simply not interested, and all are looking forward to their portion of the sale of an elderly woman's estate.

Amy Steadman returns to her grandmother's home, three months after her grandmother was murdered, to empty out the house, solve the murder and figure out why her mother committed suicide there twenty seven years ago. If that weren't enough, she also has some thinking to do about her own marriage, her relationship with her father, her position in the family toy/book/video empire she has recently inherited, and try to keep herself from being killed in the meantime. Surprisingly, no one seems to have environmental concerns. Amy's beloved grandparents reveal a darker side as she gets to know her extended family, and in the end, those who are still standing seem happier.

A fun fact: the voices of Pink and Blue, the two characters developed by her grandparents in the late 1940's surface in Amy's thirty-year-old head frequently as she faces challenges. "What do you think, Pink?" "What will we do, Blue?" Now they are in mine.

Shaun says

Probably best known for her Judge Deborah Knott Mystery Series, Maron is the author of many critically acclaimed books within the mystery genre (this particular book--a stand alone--nominated for an Agatha Award).

The writing here is good and flows nicely. In addition, there are several intertwined mysteries, all decent enough despite the fact that the ending(s) weren't really a big surprise. I'm willing to chalk that up to my superior deductive reasoning skills rather than a flaw on Maron's part. (LOL)

Unfortunately, the characters were all just a little to flat for me, and not particularly interesting. An okay read, but no where near as good as the first book in her Deborah Knott series.

Ironically, for me, the best part of the book involved the protagonist's fascination with a garden spider in which we are given some interesting tidbits. We have tons of garden spiders during the summer months and like the protagonist, we enjoy feeding them (although the first spider featured below caught this katydid all on her own). They really are beautiful and amazing spiders.

Definitely see this appealing to cozy fans...the book, that is, and not necessarily the spiders.

Denise says

Despite the many favorable reviews, I lost interest in this book and drifted away.

DD@Phila

Cathy says

While not part of the Judge Deborah Knott series, the majority of the story does take place in North Caroline and several of the lawmen/women are people we already know well. In this book, with the exception of one we have met, but don't know well, they are purely law enforcement. The book was very well written. It focuses on Amy and her blended family. Going back to NC to clear out her grandmother's house after the old woman's violent death, she gets embroiled in the mystery surrounding the fact that the murder was not just a random burglar but someone her grandmother knew and trusted. Which one (or more) of these newly reacquainted relatives couldn't wait for their inheritance? Or was it perhaps someone from the family she's grown up with or married into back in New York - that now runs the grandmother's company? Good story, well told. I did not find the killer(s?) before the author had Amy figure it out. Parts of it, with Amy trying to discover the distant past that no one will talk about, were very emotional. I missed the characters and family ties I'm used to in Margaret Maron's Deborah Knott books but this one's story and writing was just as good as those. I enjoyed it very much.

Lizpeveto says

Having read all the Deborah Knott series, reading this stand alone by Maron was just as good as her others. A southern location using local dialect which makes it seem more real to me as I'm a Texan and this is what people sound like. After her grandmother is murdered, Amy, an artist and illustrator, is the sole heir to a NY based toy company. Her father, who is CEO, and assorted half siblings are all officers of the company; as well as her husband. When Amy was 4, her mother committed suicide and even tho she has a loving stepmother; she has always wanted more information about her real mother. She also inherited her grandmother's large house and furnishings; so she takes a leave of absence to sort thru the estate. While there, she is able to meet and interact w/ her mother's relatives; all of whom will all inherit from the sale of her grandmother's house. Since her grandmother's murder investigation is still ongoing, there are suspects and frequent visits from the local police. Her husband remains in NY and appears to have other distractions and interests and not focused on his wife's grief. When her half sister resigns from the company and has no place to stay, she joins Amy to help pack. Amy begins her own murder investigation of her grandmother's death and questions her mother's supposed suicide. Lots of twists and turns and wow - a somewhat surprise ending. A different storyline w/ relatives and their human frailties and strengths. I'll look for other Maron books.

Alyson Cline says

This is the first time I have read this author. This book was the December book club selection.

The author uses a dysfunctional family situation, and the resulting impacts of self absorption to twist the plot.

Amy's sister Beth is well used in developing the family matters - but I felt this character could have been developed a bit more.

This will probably be a movie for TV soon! I enjoyed the plot twists and was surprised a bit at the ending.

A good quick read.

?Trish says

I did not guess the guilty party of the modern-day murder mystery, at all. I also didn't suspect the truth about the horrific family tragedy from the past, either. I actually disliked most of the family members of the very dysfunctional Voygt family, though (especially whiny, lazy, spoiled, and immature half-sister Beth). Overall, the ending was neat and satisfying.

Ed says

Finalist 2003 Agatha Award for Best Novel.

Thriller - Amy Steadman, a toy company executive in New York City, returns to her Southern roots one steamy August after inheriting a fortune from her murdered maternal grandmother, Frances Barbour. Aided by Beth, her pouty younger half-sister, Amy sorts through furniture, books and other personal items in Grandma Frances's summer house, where Amy's mother, Maxie, committed suicide when Amy was three. Amy is determined to find out what was really behind her mother's death-and her grandmother's, too. Amy's many kinfolk, who pass in and out of the house, seem as kind and gentle as can be, but one of them is decidedly dangerous. Cousin Curt is poisoned with jimson weed seeds cooked into a jar of preserves, and another tainted jar turns up in Amy's refrigerator.

Eva-lynn Diesenhaus says

As always an enjoyable read and good mystery. While not one of her series it was nice to see a familiar cop there. It is all about truths. And the lies we use to protect people.

Jill says

I just happened to find this book in our house. I have read several others by this author so decided to try this. Didn't see the ending. I thought I had things all figured out, but it didn't turn out that way. The story works its way around so many twists and turns. Had to stay up late one night to finish it.

Peggy says

This is the second of Margaret Maron's mysteries I have read. Like her Deborah Knott series, this book is also set in North Carolina. It involves tow mysteries: who killed Amy Stedman's grandmother and for what reason, and did Amy's mother, Maxie, really committ suicide and what was the cause.

Amy is the heiress to the P and B and M fortune. It is a publishing/ merchandising company based on childrens books: Pink and Blue and Max.

She goes to North Carolina to settle up her grandmother's estate after granpdma is found murdered. Who ever murdered her tried to make it look like a burglary but Amy has doubts after she reads the police reports. To complicate things she has to deal with her younger sister, Beth, who is not very reliable or very serious about her life. Also, she has to deal with her grandmother's friends and relatives who turn out to be somewhat eccentric.

The longer Amy stays the less she believes that her mother committed suicide and she wonders what the motivation for her grandmother's death was. Could it be that the property is very valuable since the new expressway will bring lots of malls and businesses to the area or is it some other reason? Read the book to see.

Marbeth Anne says

This is the 1st book I have read by this author! I really enjoyed it! Was a nice escape into the heroine's situations & a good mystery included! I will definitely try her series next!

Maddy says

RATING: 4.25

When Frances and Bailey Barbour's first child, Maxie, was born, she received many wonderful gifts. The one that she loved the most was a set of squishy soft animals, one pink and one blue, toys that were totally cuddly and undefined enough to open a child's imagination. As Maxie grows, she talks to her toys and Bailey captures her conversations which become the material for a series of children's books. The books succeed beyond their wildest imagination, and the toys are sold worldwide. The empire of "Pink and Blue and Max" is now run by Max's husband, Jeff Voygt. Maxie, unfortunately, was a disturbed woman who committed suicide when Max and Jeff's daughter, Amy Steadman, was just a toddler. Amy and Max's children by his second wife all work for the company, with Amy being the heir apparent.

When Amy's grandmother, Frances, is murdered, Amy leaves New York and returns to the family home in North Carolina to settle the estate. There are several relatives who have a stake in the home, and they are hoping that Amy will sell it so that they can use the proceeds. Although Amy agrees to the sale, she begins to unravel some family secrets that some do not want revealed, including events around the death of her mother. She is unable to remember anything about Maxie, and she feels a strong need to have a sense of who her mother was. In the meantime, her troubled half sister has showed up and is causing havoc; and Amy has suspicions that her husband, Eric, is cheating on her. And she finds herself attracted to the local sheriff.

The plot and particularly the resolution weren't very satisfying, and just as in the Deborah Knott books, the protagonist sometimes engages in repeating a stupid phrase to herself all throughout the narrative, in this case, "What do you think, Pink? What'll we do, Blue?" The book at first seemed to be heading into romantic suspense territory, and I was not feeling confident that it would be one that I enjoyed. I should have known better, because I've enjoyed Maron's writing in both her Sigrid Harald series and her well-known Judge Deborah Knott books. As always, Maron excels at developing the characters and especially the setting. I was glad that the book included a family tree, as there are a plethora of characters and their connections to one another were rather confusing. I particularly liked how the situation with Amy's husband played out and the very final chapter of the book. Recommended.

Barbara Walworth says

good

Gerda Leek says

enjoyed
