
Muriel Spark

The Driver's Seat

Title: The Driver's Seat

Author: Muriel Spark

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Description

Lise is thin, neither good-looking nor bad-looking. One day she walks out of her office, acquires a gaudy new outfit, adopts a girlier tone of voice, and heads to the airport to fly south. On the plane she takes a seat between two men. One is delighted with her company, the other is deeply perturbed. So begins an unnerving journey into the darker recesses of human nature.

Insightful reviews

Jennifer: A very complex book for such a slender novel (la?). From the very start the reader watches Lise go through strange and unexplainable motions such as overreacting to the stain resistant fabric of a dress or breaking into tears at the office. I say the reader "watches" because Spark is one of those wonderful writers that shows the reader the action as it unfolds - almost as if she is not writing it but simply relaying the information without prior knowledge of it. She doesn't explain the whys of the story (Lise describes a book that she carries as a "whydunnit") and forces the reader to engage in that mental exercise, drawing us into the story by foretelling Lise's death, dropping little comments about how later, the characters that Lise interacted with will have to explain their connection to her in relation to her death. Most of those connections are bizarre and random. People react to her as a type of person - student, prostitute, tourist, customer - and we watch her from a distance also trying to put her into context as she continually acts against expected type.

Written in 1970 the book has themes of gender identity (I loved how the older woman tells Lise that men are trying to get equal rights with women by wearing flowered shirts - next they will want to wear diamonds and stay home while women work!!), and social alienation that resonate today. Is Lise a victim or is Lise in control - in the Driver's Seat?

Ape: Marvellous - just continues to convince me that I love Muriel Spark. Her stories are always such a curiosity and have you thinking during and after. This short, odd little tale is about Lise, an office worker in the UK in the 70s (or late 60s) who goes on a holiday to Italy and gets murdered - whoops spoiler! Although Muriel does keep hinting at it from the word go referring to the newspaper reports and witness statements throughout the tale. Lise is a mixed up, impulsive creature, who changes mood, accent and identity almost with every person she meets. She selects a garish collection of clothes for the trip, so that she stands out in people's memories, and had odd conversations and incidents with people so that they're sure to remember her. I have to admit during a good part of the book I thought this was some kind of cunning plot of Lise's part in setting up an alibi of sorts, so that she would get some stranger who looked like her, murdered in her own garish clothes, so that Lise could run off and start a new life (office work can do that to a person). But now that I've come to the end of this novella and I'm chewing it over, I don't think it was that - well, I know it wasn't that. But I now think that Lise never appears in this book. Or rather the real Lise has nothing to do with the narrative. The narrative is built up from all the witness statements and incidents that were going on. And because the human mind is fickle and witnesses are never reliable, we see a schizophrenic Lise changing nationality, personality, accent and language throughout the town because different people think they remember different things, and it is the random little factors that stick in their

memories and get blown out of proportion. And then of course there is the murderer ***TOTAL SPOILER*** who puts his own properly crazy spin on the entire thing, making out that Lise made him do it, and her entire trip had been factored around looking for him to murder her! Really clever piece of storytelling.

Allison Parker: I have used this book many times in writing workshops to teach effective handling/power of detail, which, in this book, is obsessive. *The Driver's Seat* is hands-down the best study for economy, precision, and psychological intrigue rolled into a single manuscript; an excellent example of what can be achieved in the limited space of a novella. I cannot imagine I will ever stop learning from Spark's mastery when it comes to characterization through the selection of unique, external details. This bizarre story, through its controlled prose and buildup of tension through psychological descriptions, exemplifies the old maxim, "show, don't tell."

Suzanne Moore: Muriel Sparks tells the reader of her major character's destiny (murder) at the start of the story. What retains one studying is thinking about who did it and why. Lise is a unusual lady who flips out over insignificant and trivial things, wears loopy colours and styles ... on the comparable time, and has no qualms approximately associating with and befriending both unusual strangers. With the creation of every eccentric personality i used to be leery concerning the intentions of the connection (knowing the end result of Lise). finally i used to be much more stunned through the activities of Lise herself . I by no means in one million years might have guessed that she really used to be searching for her murderer. Makes me query her psychological kingdom even more. in all probability she used to be suicidal, yet did not want to take the blame for her personal death. I form of concept she knew her killer, who coincidentally was once lately published from a few kind of psychological healthiness facility. Her hunt for the assassin can then be assumed as premeditated, and made me imagine perhaps they'd met previously. He definitely used to be spooked by means of her at the plane ... sufficient to unexpectedly swap his seat. in fact at their first meeting, I had no assumptions a few earlier connection. This end used to be hindsight in accordance with piecing jointly his response to her then and her response to him within the end.

Ellie: a standard Spark event: meaning, of course, it is not "typical" by any means of something yet Spark's originality and occasionally (certainly here) very irritating view of people. there is virtually no aspect in giving the plot-well, ok, a girl has to take a holiday from her workplace activity as she is wasting her mind-but really, she's going loopy and never in an excellent way-and is going on a holiday looking, apparently, for a guy who will kill her.It's a quick and enchanting work. It does not take lengthy to learn however it retains operating within you once you finish. it is a day later and i am nonetheless going, Wait...what?I'll most likely need to learn it again. Soon. yet i am not yes what sort of temper to attend to reread it in.

William1: Lise, a suicidally unsatisfied lady in a dead-end job, travels to southern Italy to discover an individual to homicide her. Lise, girls like her, i haven't from time to time heard often called "bitches on wheels." She lies pathologically, casually steals cars, and perceives own insults in concerns that truly don't have anything to do with her. (She is going ballistic early on while advised costume she's attempting on is made from stain-resistant fabric. She thinks the salesperson, through pointing out this straightforward fact, ability to name her a sloppy eater.) My favourite passages within the novella contain the seduction of Lise undertaken through a

macrobiotic vitamin fanatic, Bill, whose absurd monologues on Yin meals and Yang meals are hilarious. there's additionally Mrs. Friedke, an octogenarian, who tags in addition to Lise in the course of purchasing excursions. those jaunts devolve in time to a colloquy on who could or is probably not "Lise's man," with Mrs. Friedke blithely oblivious to the true objective this fellow is to serve. The Driver's Seat could have served as one in all Martin Amis' types for his novel London Fields. In that longer book, one other woman, Nicola Six, methodically units out to find her murderer. pointless to say, either girls are successful. There are passages in either books, too, which self-describe them as "whydoits" instead of whodunits.

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