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The **New York Times** Bestseller from the beloved author of **Bird by Bird** and **Traveling Mercies**.

Mattie Ryder is marvelously neurotic, well-intentioned, funny, religious, sarcastic, tender, angry, and broke. Her life at the moment is a wreck: her marriage has failed, her mother is failing, her house is rotting, her waist is expanding, her children are misbehaving, and she has a crush on a married man. Then she finds a small rubber blue shoe—nothing more than a gumball trinket—left behind by her father. For Mattie, it becomes a talisman—a chance to recognize the past for what it was, to see the future as she always hoped it could be, and to finally understand her family, herself, and the ever-unfolding mystery of her sweet, sad, and sometimes surprising life.

Blue Shoe Details

Date : Published September 2nd 2003 by Riverhead Books (first published September 30th 2002)

ISBN : 9781573223423

Author : Anne Lamott

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Fiction, Novels, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Blue Shoe for online ebook

Ginger Bensman says

No one is a bigger fan of Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, than me. It's gentle and funny and full of smart advice about writing, so when my book club selected *Blue Shoe* I was right on board. But *Blue Shoe* turned out to be a schizophrenic read for me. Her depiction of children was spot-on perfect. I could relate to the adult characters, and there were many of them. They were consistent and believable, but most of them were wallowing in emotional wreckage, and I just didn't like them very much, not even the protagonist, Mattie. At the beginning of the book, Mattie is devastated and reeling when her husband leaves her for another woman, then, not only does she continue to share a sporadic sexual relationship with her ex but she sets her sights on an innocent likeable man who is happily married (this from a character who is always asking God for advice).

Lamott is a master of description and the original phrase, and much of the language is beyond beautiful. Take for example, "Isa's voice often sounded flimsy these days, as if it might tear, like old rice paper," but many of her metaphors felt so self conscious, I thought they distracted from the story.

Some reviewers have said they like Lamott's earlier novels better. In a few months, maybe I'll try one of those.

Jinni Pike says

Blue Shoe was exactly OK. While there are some very lovely passages and I occasionally found myself pulled in to the plot, on the whole the book failed to capture my interest or elicit sympathy from me. The lead character Mattie changes moods so often it's hard to follow or relate to her. One second she's praying to Jesus and the next thinking about pouring Drano on top of her son's iguana. I understand this is a story about a woman in the midst of a crisis (or many, though each very "first world") but it spans a 4 year time and she never seems to grow or claw her way up higher. The book ends with her exactly as desperate and confused as at when it started. Things happen around her but never seem to really affect her besides giving her more reasons to justify the way she's always felt: sad, lonely, unable to enjoy her life.

The issue of religion seems to only be thrown into the mix because the author herself is a believer. Though Mattie attempts to gain clarity and comfort from God she uses church as an excuse to get close to her married best friend or escape her problems without really taking to heart the things she says she believes.

And it was hard to get more than a foggy image in my mind on any of the supporting characters.

The most interesting part of the book for me was the decline of her mother's health and the difficulty Mattie and her brother have to deal with to assure their mother is cared for.

Susanchitter says

I pretty much trudged through the book waiting for it to get interesting. It felt like I was sleep walking through someone's dysfunctional life, someone who I had little interest in. I kept waiting for the "blue shoe" to become significant and revealing. I could see potential in the story but it just never seemed to come together so that the reader cared about the story.

Angela says

I enjoyed this book. I moved through it, riding the emotional ebbs & tides it's characters created, filled with sorrow & erupting with laughter. It was hauntingly familiar. As I read it kept bringing back moments of Anne Lamott's own life as if excerpts from her memoirs in new flesh. As with Anne's writing the truth comes to you frankly and you take it as it is. That's how these character's lives are laid bare, in all their shame & all their joy, they are made awkwardly & endearingly real. I was brokenhearted for their brokenness.

There are passages of sexuality that are a bit raw for my own senses. I could have done without those images flickering in my head. They don't magnify the desperation the characters feel nor illustrate the commonness of their need as I believe they were intended to do. That said, I appreciate how simply put those passages were. They were not sensationalized or mist filled encounters. That, in itself, is a rare thing.

Altogether this was a sad & moving story about broken people trying to make a life among their bits & pieces. There are moments of hope along the way & promises of more to come.

Enjoy the read.

Jon says

I was very disappointed in this novel, since I thoroughly enjoyed the author's *Traveling Mercies* and had been looking forward to this. Lamott has created a character essentially like herself only more neurotic and less funny. She then provided her with enough of a story for 40 or 50 pages and stretched it to a 320 page novel. It went on and on, circling the same old problems, only inching forward occasionally. The heroine made incredibly stupid choices and whined when the results were not happy for her. She seemed manic-depressive, was in favor of therapy or drugs or both for her friends and relatives, but somehow the possibility never came up for her. In the last pages of the book she was still able to revel in the joy of her close family frolicking in the Pacific surf, and then a few paragraphs later imagine herself pulling a Virginia Woolf by loading her pockets with rocks and walking into the ocean. She thought to herself: "She must have a screw loose somewhere. Oh, well." Oh well indeed. The blue shoe of the title is a little rubber sneaker she has found in her late father's effects and which she takes as a talisman. She loans it out to friends who are in desperate situations, and gets it back when times are particularly bad for her. In the last pages it is lost irretrievably. I can think of a dozen things it might have symbolized, none of them very helpful. There are many attempts at evocative metaphors that don't work. "Some mornings the sun hauled itself up reluctantly, rolling like a slow bowling ball across the sky." What can one say to this except: No, it didn't. The religious insight I was hoping for never rose much above the level of a bumper sticker. A big disappointment.

Jeff says

Oh my, oh my, oh my! I really don't know what to say about this book except ... oh my, oh my, oh my!

Anne Lamott is such an incredibly talented and honest writer, but this is a big unwieldy mess of a book.

There are little gems in the writing, in the characterizations, and in the telling of this novel, which saves it, for me, from an "I hated it" rating. The problem is that it tackles too many storylines and ultimately doesn't do any of them justice. In the laundry list of conflicting narratives, the novel grapples with faith, divorce, aging parents, hidden pasts, parenthood, sexual abuse, infidelity, and statutory rape. A few of these issues in one narrative would be a lot; all of them together read like twelve hours of Lifetime made-for-TV movies.

Michelle says

I bought this book to read with my book club. I probably would not have chosen it on my own.

This is the first book by Anne Lamott I read - or I should say ATTEMPTED to read. And it will be my last. I absolutely hated this book. I'm an avid reader, and I can not remember the last time I started a book and didn't finish it. Normally, I feel compelled to read a book to the end, even if I don't like it, thinking there must be something redeeming about it. I kept pushing myself to finish this one, but just could not get into it. I can't recall another book that I have started and left unfinished in the last 20 years.

This book is about a divorced woman dealing with her family relationships. Her family is highly dysfunctional. Every character in this book is dysfunctional... Beyond that, they are just plain weird. I couldn't relate to any of it. The main character is just the most whiny, awfully depicted person I've ever read about! I could clearly see why this couple was divorced, though. They were a pair of nut jobs. It's a story about nothing... It just goes on and on. I will never be able to read another Anne Lamott novel. This was just so bad!

Sylvia Valevicius says

I read some reviews that were barely one star for this book. I am giving this book five stars because the writing craft is extraordinary! Period.

This is my first Anne Lamott book. I had heard of her but had never read anything of hers. After finding it at Goodwill, where many gems are donated by others and discovered and cherished by me, I read it in about a week, taking my time. Half way through the book, I stopped and ordered her 'Bird by Bird' from Amazon - a non-fiction about writing, itself.

I loved the imperfect characters; they seemed to express reality. I did not judge them as evil, but as flawed human beings. There are so many confused people in real life that get stuck in situations against their own better judgement. I did not approve of a lot of the behaviours but I enjoyed seeing what they would do with their lives, how they would solve their problems. I found a certain character, Abby, in the adult of her life a bit extreme. But you never know - given her experiences...I liked many of the surprises which I guessed at, and had the satisfaction of being right.(SMILE.) I also wanted more from the ending. But then again, that's the reader's version. And I AM glad that certain things did not happen (hint: Isa)

Here are some examples of beautiful writing:

'It was not facing what life dealt that made you crazy, but rather trying to set life straight where it was unstraightenable.'

'When she sat down, she curled around herself, wrapping one leg around the other as if she were made out of pipe cleaners.'

'One rainy morning in mid-March, Ella sat at the window staring like a cat at the snakes of water that raced down the pane.'

Enviably talented. Can't wait for my writing book to arrive in the mail!

Christopher Hicks says

This was a weird book! I didn't hate it but I didn't love it either. I found it interesting at times but mostly the main characters were just so blah!! I was lost on the time period of this story. None of what the author wrote lined up. I could never figure out entire sequences of the book and that's irritating to me. There were also storylines and characters that just disappeared and I'm still not sure of the great significance of the "blue shoe" other than something to use to give a title. I was gonna give it three stars but the horrible nonsensical ending (probably one of the worst endings I've ever read in any book! I still don't get it?) caused it to lose a star. Despite the bad it did have good detail and I found a lot of things in it that I was personally emotionally connected to. The whole storyline between Mattie and her mother Isa was at times eerily familiar to things I personally dealt with with my own mother. A better ending could have really saved this book.

Sharlene says

Many times while reading this book I asked myself why I didn't just stop and start something I might like better. As it was recommended by a friend, I remained hopeful that there would be some redeeming value to the story. Please--at least give me protagonist that exemplifies some values and good judgment or at least learns something in the end. Lamott's lead character of choice starts right off with sleeping back and forth with her ex-husband (who is in a relationship with a pregnant girlfriend), and a grocer she grew up with, while lusting after her handyman (who is also married). The main storyline dealt with her trying to learn more about her now-deceased father, triggered by coming across the contents (including a small blue shoe) of the glove box of a car her father used to own. Come to find out--surprise, surprise--more dysfunction. I felt I was being drug through a woman's trailer-trashy life, complete with equally dysfunctional family members. There wasn't a single character in the book I could feel any sympathy with or relate to in any way.

Kathleen says

Okay, "didn't like it" is as bad as Goodreads gets, but believe me, I looked for a "hated it" button. I really HATED it! Mattie, the main character, is awful - self obsessed, but lacking any self awareness. A terrible friend, an awful mother, a lousy daughter - Mattie runs the gamut. Constantly praying (but virtually always just for herself - please, please, God, let my friend's husband leave her for me, etc.) and nearly constantly whining, Mattie is the most selfish character I have seen in quite a long time. I got the impression the author didn't see her in that way, but rather as an endearing figure - trying to forgive her parents and her ex-husband and make her way in the world. She isn't though - she is just bitter, selfish and generally awful. Idly fantasizing about your mother dropping dead, killing your kids or drowning their beloved iguana in drano is not cute, really it is not.

I have heard raves about Anne Lamott's nonfiction and will try it at some point (it may take a while for the memory of this horror to fade). As a lover of novels, I am also a lover of characters, and the ones here are just not compelling in any fashion. The only time I related to anyone in this book was when Mattie's young son, Harry, locked himself in the bathroom and refused to let Mattie in, screaming "You will just talk about God!" Scoot over, Harry, I feel you!

Barb says

I wanted to like this book. It seems as though the author didn't herself have kids or else just didn't get it, because every part that had to do with the woman and her children seemed so off the reservation for me it just made the whole story completely unbelievable and contrived. Also the whole religion thing was not entirely consistent either with the woman's behavior or attitudes towards others, like she went to church with earphones on.

Laura says

"Hurt people hurt other people. That's the way it works."
- Blue Shoe

Anne Lamott is one of my favorite writers, but until this book I had never read any of her fiction. I first discovered Anne Lamott when my first daughter was born. Operating Instructions is a fabulous book. It is her funny, honest, sad, and optimistic account of her first year as a mother. She is a single mother, but her experiences of being totally in love and totally in over her head are universal.

A few years later, I read Traveling Mercies, a collection of essays in which Lamott shares her trek out of alcoholism and into Jesus. Again, she keeps it real, irreverent and funny even as she describes hitting bottom. To label Lamott a Christian writer would be to miss the mark (and probably disappoint or irritate a few Christian readers) because she doesn't have a Christian agenda, she simply shares her experiences and her faith. I loved it.

Last year, I read Bird by Bird, which is a book about writing. Again, her wonderfully funny self just shines through in this great book. It's a worthwhile book whether or not you are an inspiring writer.

So, The Blue Shoe. It is a wonderfully funny and believable book. It chronicles the years following Mattie Ryder's divorce. You see Mattie struggling to juggle her children, her rapidly aging mother, her ex-husband, her relationships, and her father's secrets. Her children are damaged by the breakup of their home, and so is Mattie, but she does the best she can.

Having read Lamott's non-fiction, there is much of Anne herself in this book. It was refreshing to see Mattie rely on her faith and her church. She prays to Jesus to help her daughter who is slowly gnawing away her fingers (through the nails), to give her patience when her son acts up, when she falls in love with the wrong man. And, it doesn't come off as preachy, just real.

"The crying will wash it out," she said, pulling him into her lap. He tore at his eye, rubbed hard, whimpered, and she cooed and patted him with mounting hostility... What would Jesus do? Roll his eyes and growl softly,

as she was doing? She pictured Jesus and the men He lived with, whiny bachelors all - "Can I be first?" "What about me, Lord" - and saw Him sigh and head back up the mountain. Where could she go?

Her child sobbed in her arms, and she held him. Boy, she thought, when Jesus said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven, He was definitely not referring to Harry. Maybe He had been misquoted. Maybe he did not say you must be like little children, but that you should eat the little children - with a little butter and garlic.

-The Blue Shoe

At the beginning of the book, Mattie keeps thinking of her father, wishing he were still alive. If she could lean on him, she knows it would give her the strength she needs to keep things together. As the book progresses, she and her brother start a little detective work to figure out some questions about her father, and the answers are not what she expected.

Julia says

This book will not be taking space on my book shelves! I have heard good reviews on Anne Lamott's "Traveling Mercies" which is about her faith. So maybe she writes good non-fiction. This book is a novel and I don't think it is written very well. It just seems like a lot of drivel to me. None of the characters are likeable. The main character, Mattie, is a recently divorced woman with 2 children. But she herself is extremely immature and not too bright. But I don't think this is the intent of the author.

Mattie feels it is important to go to church every Sunday, but there is no connection between church and her life. However, the author throws in religious phrases and thoughts now and again to make the reader think the characters have a faith. As an example: Mattie asks God, "is it O.K. if I keep having sex with my ex-husband who is now remarried with a pregnant wife while I am having sex with my new boyfriend?" I just found this whole book rather stupid. I see it has gotten alot of 5 star ratings, but that just means we are all different in our interests, right?

Jennifer Lane says

I wanted to like this book club selection but I found it too depressing and boring to finish. Here are a few comments from what I did read.

Mattie Ryder is recently divorced with two young children. Somehow she makes a living from modeling size 12 clothing for Sears? She's depressed from her divorce, and ruminates about her family, her children, and her friends. She sleepwalks through life, and the story plods along without much happening. When she finds a little blue shoe her father owned, the object becomes a small symbol of hope for her, bringing her comfort in her down time.

I did enjoy the symbolism of the shoe. Here Maddie reflects:

She'd read somewhere that after World War II ended in Europe, lost children wandered around until they were gathered in campus run by the Allies. There they were fed and cared for while relatives were located or new families found who could take them in. In one camp it was discovered that none of the children was sleeping well. Their nerves were shot, the memories fresh and haunting. Then a social worker determined

that if the children were each given a piece of bread to hold at night, they could fall asleep. This was not bread to eat--there was plenty of that when the children were hungry. No, this piece of bread was just to hold on to, to reassure the children through the night that they were safe now, that there would be bread to eat in the morning.

That is a precious story backed by object relations theory. As a psychologist, I sometimes give my clients stuffed animals or other objects to hang onto and to remember our work together, to help remind them of coping skills.

I also liked Angela, Mattie's blunt friend:

"Honey," Angela replied, "you don't know yourself well enough right now to commit suicide. So it would be considered a homicide."

But overall I didn't care much for the plot or the characters. Mattie isn't very likable, nor is her attraction to a married man named Lewis. The physical description of Lewis was hardly appealing to me. Too bad this one wasn't for me!
