



Compromising Positions

Susan Isaacs

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The brilliant debut that's sold over a million copies-now in trade paperback for the first time!

Rediscover the "wonderfully funny, deliciously mean" (*New York Times*) novel that launched Susan Isaacs' *New York Times* bestselling career-and introduced Long Island housewife Judith Singer, her most beloved character. Judith is smart and funny, with a gorgeous husband and wonderful kids. She's also incredibly bored, having put her Ph.D. plans on hold for a life of housekeeping and nose-wiping. So when a local dentist is found murdered, and the police suspect her neighbor, that's all the excuse Judith needs to jump in and begin her own investigation. It seems the deceased periodontist was quite the Don Juan of the PTA, with a habit of taking incriminating photos. In between school runs and making dinner, Judith is drawn deeper into the case-and closer to the sexy police detective in charge.

Compromising Positions Details

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Author : Susan Isaacs

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Vanessa says

I liked this back when I read this, which was in the 80's around the time that the Susan Sarandon film came out. I'll buck the trend a bit here and say that the book is far better than the movie (point in the movie's favor: it's well cast with Sarandon, Raul Julia, and Judith Ivey.)

The main character is a bright but bored Long Island stay-at-home housewife who investigates the seemingly random murder of a local periodontist with whom she had a passing strictly doctor/patient acquaintance, something she discovers makes her a bit of an anomaly amongst his female patients. Her investigation entertains her equally bright but bored friends and annoys her husband, particularly when it seems that she has also caught the killer's attention. It's fun and funny and snappy on the surface. If you dig a little deeper, it's also smart and inspiringly first wave feminist (the book was written in 1979.) You can finish this in a day or two and enjoy it. I meant to read more Susan Isaacs, although I never did.

Edie says

I can't recommend this book highly enough. In 1978, a suburban NYC mom inveigles herself into a police investigation of a murder.

Eva says

Judith Singer is a bored housewife living in a very upscale neighborhood. Her only activities are carpooling and preparing nutritious dinners for her children. When a local dentist is murdered, she jumps at the chance to investigate. Unfortunately, she is no Miss Marple. Many pages later, she has only collected three clues.

In boredom, I put down the book and didn't finish it. She and her suspects are dull as ditch water and I don't care who did it.

Denise says

Readalike: This Pen for Hire, Goodnight Nobody

Ari Jarvis says

I've never blatantly rooted for a character to have an affair. I admit it was a moment of insanity, especially considering they intend to continue the affair, rather than divorce their partners. But, whatever, who am I to judge?

The mystery itself was interesting enough, but I loved the side characters. The idea of sweet, Christian housewives being involved in scandalous sexual activities is just as intriguing to Judith as it is to the readers.

The villains were a little cookie cutter and tedious. But Nelson Sharpe is a charming and sexy character, and I like how he treats Judith as though she is intelligent and fascinating. I think his respectful treatment of Judith is what makes me love Sharpe, despite his being a philanderer.

As far as Judith's husband is concerned, he's a patronizing dick who takes his wife for granted.

I did truly enjoy Susan Isaac's' conversational, witty style. My mom says her other book aren't as enjoyable, but I am curious just for her writing style.

Jocelyn says

Almost done it. Part way through, I suddenly thought to check the publication date 1978! no wonder some little details seemed odd lol! like salary mentions and phones with cords attached to walls lol!

Picked it up randomly from a local library as is the norm for me with picking books.

I find it quite laugh out loud funny here and there, find the situation not believable at all but hey it's fiction, some of the dialogue odd but all in all I really like it. There are subtleties about presenting the character's personality that aren't hit you over the head in style, which I like, the main character is great, such a smart ass; her husband is an unbelievable jerk and I'm routin' for her to dump the guy.

Not generally a mystery liker but I gave this book a chance because I like quirky and funny books. Glad to see it was republished.

Sue says

I nearly put this book down a few times. At around 1/3 of the way through, I did say "that's it!", and was going to put it down - the only thing that kept me reading was pure laziness. I don't like starting a new book before I go to bed, so I kept reading that night, and then I was almost finished, so I might as well find out what happened.

Here are some of the things that I didn't like:

1. I don't buy that she's really that curious about the murder of someone that she met once. All of a sudden, she's neck-deep in an investigation, and I can't even figure out why she's curious! I get that she's a bored housewife. I also get that there's often a curiosity when there are sordid details. But really...she has to set up interviews with people to get more dirt on the guy's extra-marital affairs. People usually are either nosy, or they're not nosy. In her case, she'd never been nosy, or she would have known all about the dirt surrounding the dentist.

2. The protagonist was passive. I mean, really passive. She put up with a lot of shit from her husband that women nowadays don't put up with. I know that it was written in the 70s, but I'm reading it today, and it's cheesing me off. Her husband was a real dick, and I don't say that lightly.

3. I didn't buy the affair. If she was that easy, she would have had an affair already. I would have expected her to be more...I don't know...conflicted. Excited. Horny. I don't know. Something other than what it was. She just said "he makes me hot", "he's pretty dreamy", "yeah, I guess I'll sleep with him".

Basically, I just felt that neither the romance nor the mystery was very strong - both were weak stories. I also didn't like any of the characters. What's left? The setting? Nope. So really, there were no redeeming qualities. Don't pick up this book.

Veronica Marie Lewis-Shaw says

Written with a wicked sense of humour and wit as sharp as a mohel's knife, *Compromising Positions*, and its unforgettable protagonist, Judith Singer, offers an eye-opening look inside a Nassau county bedroom community and reminds us that what happens behind closed doors doesn't always stay behind closed doors.

I'd always considered dentists rather mild-mannered sorts, but Susan shatters that 'myth', and does it with such a wonderful narrative style, weaving completely believable characters (I have worked with a couple of these 'types') into a plot worthy of the silver screen, that *Compromising Positions* definitely earns a five-star with this reader.

The back cover of my copy has the blurb... 'brilliant first novel...'

I couldn't agree more. I will certainly be adding more of Susan's works to my reading list.

I recommend *Compromising Positions* without hesitation. Thank you, Susan, for a first rate story!

Veronica Marie Lewis-Shaw
9 March 2013
Cannon Beach, Oregon

Marianne says

Extremely funny! Loved the main character Judith's sarcastic sense of humor. There is one particular thought of Judith's on page 67 that was outer limits creative. Gave me a new slant on certain things. Kudos to Susan Isaacs

Olivermagnus says

Judith Singer is a mid-thirties bored housewife living in the New York suburbs. When she learns the local periodontist has been murdered it's the most exciting thing to ever happen in her neighborhood so she takes an active interest in all the news. When she learns he was also sleeping with half the women she knows and possibly blackmailing them, she decides to do some sleuthing among her friends and neighbors. Her stuffy husband vigorously discourages her investigation, but she continues to pursue it. She also meets a police detective who complicates her life more than a bit.

This is Susan Isaacs first book, written in the mid-seventies and it had a slightly dated feel for me. The plot was very funny at several points and Judith's Jewish angst made it even funnier. The author did a great job of conveying the bored suburban housewife of the 70s but ultimately I didn't enjoy it as much as I thought I would. I don't plan to read the sequel (After All These Years) which takes place twenty years later.

L. says

It is rare when I proclaim a film adaptation better than the original book. This is one of those occasions. The dialogue is very 1980s yuppie, East Coast- dull, soulless, and self-centered. It sets the tone aptly for the story of the murder of a wealthy (and criminal) dentist with a habit of seducing married patients. Raul Julia, one of the best actors ever, was excellent as the harried detective trying to keep Susan Sarandon's Judith out of his case. The performances in the film make the book look colorless. The only other two times I have witnessed this phenomena were "The Witches of Eastwick" and "Blade Runner". But, then again, what author can compete with a tantrumming Jack Nicholson and Ridley Scott. Impossible.

Mary says

If you read this book, or even if you do not, I highly recommend the movie version starring Susan Sarandon and Raul Julia. It's one of those that if I am flipping channels, if it's on, I will be late for whatever I thought I was going to do next----I HAVE to watch it!
Oh yeah, the book is fun to read, too.

Molly says

Just what I wanted in a pool-side read. Funny and fast. The gender/racial/cultural dimensions make it a bit more interesting. I guess I should be less surprised about how little has changed since this was written.

Elliedakota says

This was probably very daring in the 70's, but not so much now. I've never watched anything in the "Real Housewives of" genre but this is what I imagine they would be like if set back then.

Melissa McShane says

The first time I read this (many years ago) I loved the mystery and all the little details of a murder complicated by emotional blackmail, adultery, and organized crime. This time I was surprised to discover that my life is now very similar to Judith Singer's, and what a difference it is to have that life in 2013 rather than 1978. I keep forgetting how hard it was for many women in the '70s, trying to be defined by something other than their relationship to a man. And yet in the differences between Bob Singer and Nelson Sharpe, it's

clear that not all men were sexist pigs, that not all women were dissatisfied with being housewives, but also that fighting those gender roles (both male and female) still wasn't easy. Isaacs doesn't focus too much on the details of late-1970s fashion, design, or culture, so the book remains surprisingly readable and relevant. I'm not sure how I feel about the adultery, which is an important part of the story, but in general this is a book I enjoy coming back to.

Ivonne Rovira says

I saw the 1985 film version of *Compromising Positions* many years ago, I thoroughly enjoyed it; however, as nearly always proves true, the book is much, much better.

Judith Singer, underappreciated Long Island housewife, becomes intrigued by the murder of periodontist and lothario Dr. Bruce Fleckstein. Fleckstein had additional legal troubles that I won't reveal, so the list of suspects — scorned lovers, cuckolded husbands, mistreated family members, even Mafiosi — is pretty long.

But it wasn't the taut, suspenseful mystery that hooked me — although author Susan Isaacs imbues her 1978 book with an excellent plot that impelled me to devour the book in two days; what really got me was Isaacs' sly sendup of upper-middle-class expectations, limitations and hypocrisies. That especially includes her depiction of the vaguely unsatisfactory nature of modern American life for women, whether they're at home with the kids or out in the business world. Judith Singer trained as a history scholar, but here she is, living a life in the suburbs in which her greatest intellectual challenge is getting the steak grilled at exactly the right time. Judith finds herself playing games of what if. What if I had become a college professor? What if I had married an intellectual? What if I had remained in New York City? What if, what if

The 1970s saw enormous changes in what women wanted out of life and love, but, even in the 21st century, we still find ourselves compromising our true selves and playing our own games of what if. Except for Erica Jong and Julie Mulhern, no one else is even in Isaacs' league in shining a light into women's souls. Despite nearly 40 years, Isaacs' musings aren't dated, and readers will still adore *Compromising Positions*.

Gwen says

This made for a great book club: so much laughter about the over-the-top characterization, heavy-handed plot, and snarky one-liners; so much discussion of gender roles and suburban 1970s Long Island; so much conversation about the murder and the affairs...

Compromising Positions isn't a good work of literature, but damn, this was fun reading.

Susan Ecker says

Fun to read but implausible. Why does everyone have to be dissatisfied in marriage and cheating?

Gabby says

I read this book in 1978 when it was first published, and I loved it. I thought it was clever and funny, and since I was just starting to read through the mystery genre, I thought the story was well done.

I don't agree with myself on any of this after my second read-through. I've read a whole lot more mysteries since 1978, and **Compromising Positions** is in no way on par with mysteries I now consider to be very good. Actually, Isaacs has written a cross between a mystery and chick lit, but back in 1978 Chick Lit wasn't even a genre. It is now, though, and Isaacs does not compare favorably with any of the current favorites from that category.

Judith Singer is a SAHM to her two children. She's educated and could easily get a teaching job, but she's not thrilled with a career in education, and she likes being home for her children. Women's Lib was becoming a big issue back in the days this book was published, and some of the issues women wrestled with at that time show up in Isaac's book. I would think women much younger than me reading this book would have a hard time keeping a straight face as they read about women who make a career out of cooking and cleaning and running family errands. But that's really not what spoils this story. What does that is: the mystery is just plain dumb. It's not credible in the assumptions it makes about what women who stay at home to care for their families do. Further, when the police get involved in trying to solve the murder of a respected dentist, credibility gets stretched to the absolute limit. The interaction between Judith Singer and the detective leading the murder investigation has so much wrong with it, it's hilarious rather than being a key part to the story development.

If I remember correctly, **Compromising Positions** was a big hit when it was originally published. All I can think is that we had much lower expectations back then.

Rebekkila says

This book was written in the 1970's, although it is a mystery novel, I found that reading this story now made it more relevant as a glimpse into the life of a 70's suburban housewife than as a mystery. The story I think was meant to be about a bored housewife's interest into the murder of a local periodontist made more interesting to her because several of her friends/neighbors were suspects.

The periodontist was married and had an eye for the ladies as well as having mob connections which lead to many suspects. The protagonist, Judith, is home every day keeping house, and greeting the children at the bus. Her husband commutes from Long Island into New York everyday to his job in the family business. When he gets home he expects Judith to greet him at the door to take his jacket, the kids are seen but not heard. He is given his dinner and reads the paper while Judith prepares the children for bed and then does the dishes. At the end of the night if he is in the mood for "marital relations" he sends out signals that she is expected to respond to.

No wonder Judith gets bored and starts talking to the suspects that she is friends with. Her friends are having affairs and leading double lives and she is intrigued. The best part of the story was watching Judith realize her values as a person and not just the dutiful wife and mother. Who cares if they find the murderer, Judith finding herself is the real story.

Side note, I am trying to find a copy of the movie which stars Susan Sarandon but neither Netflix nor my

local library has a copy. This movie was released in 1985, it probably has not even made it to disc yet.
