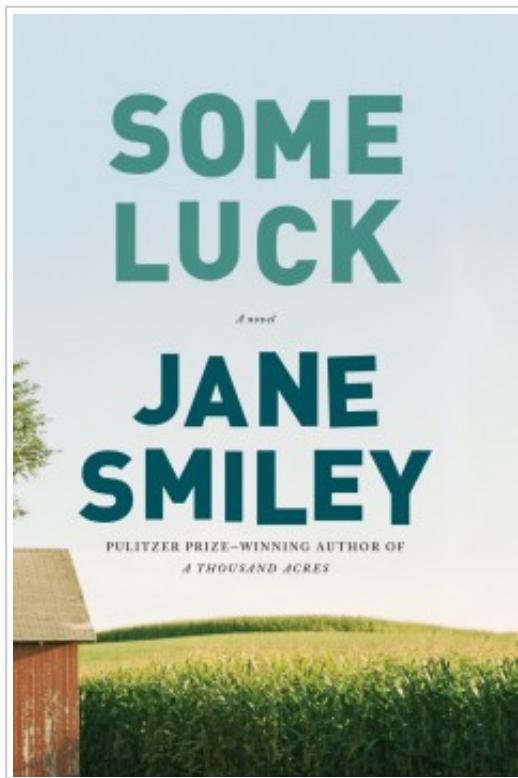


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Some Luck

by Jane Smiley

Price: \$26.95(Hardcover)

Published: October 07, 2014

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: Longlisted for the 2014 National Book Award

From the winner of the Pulitzer Prize: a powerful, engrossing new novel—the life and times of a remarkable family over three transformative decades in America.

On their farm in Denby, Iowa, Rosanna and Walter Langdon abide by time-honored values that they pass on to their five wildly different children: from Frank, the handsome, willful first born, and Joe, whose love of animals and the land sustains him, to Claire, who earns a special place in her father's heart.

Each chapter in Some Luck covers a single year, beginning in 1920, as American soldiers like Walter return home from World War I, and going up through the early 1950s, with the country on the cusp of enormous social and economic change. As the Langdons branch out from Iowa to both coasts of America, the...

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What We Say

Author Jane Smiley has already won the Pulitzer Prize for "A Thousand Acres" and delivered numerous other compelling works for adults and young people. But when you read "Some Luck" -- the first in a proposed trilogy that traces the life of a family and the life of America from 1920 to today -- it's easy to believe you're reading her magnum opus. The story begins in Iowa and the life of Rosanna and Walter Langdon. Each chapter captures a moment in that year, progressing from 1920 to 1921 and 1922 and so on, with all the inevitability and surprise of the seasons. We know the major events looming up before them, like the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl years, World War II and beyond. But the real drama comes not from the panorama of the changing years but in the very particular lives of the Langdons and their six children. Smiley is especially remarkable when telling a chapter from the point of view of a small child. She creates such vivid and specific people that our intimate knowledge of them carries through their lives; we know these people better than we know ourselves and yet still they surprise us and yet remain true to who they are. Romance, heartbreak, the Sisyphean struggle with the land, the brave leap out of the family nest to see the world or just cross the street and farm the land in a slightly different way than your father: it's all here. Smiley's language is clear and direct but wonderfully subtle. You'll experience changing attitudes towards breastfeeding, the Cold War, impulsive moments that change a life, marriages that drift apart and drift back together again out of familiarity or rekindled love or inertia and always, always, the ever-surprising miracle parents share of watching a child grow and seeing what they do with their lives. Easily one of the best books of the year. Now where's book two?

-- Michael Giltz

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What Others Say

"This sweeping, carefully plotted novel traces the history, from 1920 to the Cold War era, of a single Iowa farming family. Each chapter focuses on one year, setting the minor catastrophes and victories of the family's life against a backdrop of historical change, particularly the Great Depression. As the children branch out from their tiny town, so, too, does the story, eventually encompassing several generations, cities, and cultural movements. Smiley, like one of her characters contemplating the guests at the Thanksgiving table, begins with an empty house and fills it 'with twenty-three different worlds, each one of them rich and mysterious.'" —The New Yorker

"What's unusual about Some Luck is how closely it's meant to mimic real life, and yet how important Smiley's gifts as a novelist are to achieving that effect. The way the story unfolds makes it feel not so much like reading a novel as catching up with relatives every couple of months, finding out who's been up to what and comparing stories. Characters reminisce about scenes from earlier in the book that start to feel like our memories, too. Smiley's ability to sketch a scene, to bring to life the...

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