



# The Promised World

*Lisa Tucker*

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**The Promised World** Lisa Tucker

**From the bestselling author of *The Cure for Modern Life* and *Once Upon a Day* comes a riveting novel of suspense about a literature professor whose carefully constructed life is shattered after the death of her twin brother and the unraveling of the secret world they shared.**

On a March afternoon, while Lila Cole is working in her quiet office, her twin brother Billy points an unloaded rifle out of a hotel window across from an elementary school, closing down a city block. “Suicide by police” was obviously Billy’s intended result, but the aftermath of his death brings shock after shock for Lila when she discovers that her twin—the person she thought she was closer to than anyone in the world—was not only estranged from his wife, but also charged with endangering the life of his middle child and namesake, eightyear- old William. Lila’s quest for answers puts her job, her marriage, and even her sanity at risk as she begins to learn the horrible truth about her family. When Billy’s children are in danger of repeating the twins’ tragic past, all of the characters will have to confront their own complicity and recognize the deep guilt that always tortured Billy even as he spun a beautiful dream of the future from the stories he loved—a classic American myth of redemption and second chances. Compulsively readable and empathetically written in Tucker’s artful prose, *The Promised World* is an epic tale of intimacy, betrayal, and lost innocence that will haunt readers long after they turn the final page.

## The Promised World Details

Date : Published September 1st 2009 by Atria Books (first published August 1st 2009)

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Author : Lisa Tucker

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# From Reader Review The Promised World for online ebook

## Gina Wymore says

The Promised World by Lisa Tucker is a fiction novel and psychological thriller. When successful literary professor Lila Cola learns about her twin brother Billy's death, her life is turned upside down. Billy had been her rock and the bond they shared was indestructible. She describes a troubled childhood where she recalls little, however, Billy had filled in the gaps with stories of cheerful times. It isn't until his death that Lila comes to know the truth about her childhood, family, and brother.

Billy was incredibly intelligent and engaging. Lila found him to be a literary master as he constantly discussed books and shared theories with her. Lila could not fathom that her brother could point a gun out of a hotel window towards a school. While she believed he would never harm a fly, the police still took action and shot him dead. His "suicide by police" left Lila confused and alone, prompting her to dig up her past. What she understood from her childhood was dependent on the stories Billy had shared. Without his presence, she again felt lost and perplexed. The torment drove a wedge in her marriage and caused Lila to question other relationships. In the process, she learned greater truths about her mother, niece and nephew, and the "Cole curse." The loss of her brother soon transformed Lila into what her friends and colleges saw to be unstable. Her condition even prohibited her from taking custody of her niece and nephew in times of need.

I thought this was an interesting novel that kept my attention throughout. I think older secondary students might enjoy this book. The psychological after shock may be a facet students suffering from depression may relate to and learn from. Themes like relationships, abuse, and shock are revealed and may be enlightening and better understood by more mature students. Additionally, teenagers may better comprehend the heartaches, temptations, and shared relationships within the story.

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## Nancy says

Lila Cole seemingly has it made: she teaches English literature at a good university in Pennsylvannia, her husband, Patrick was willing to take a lesser job at a smaller university to accompany her there, and she seems to have a solid marriage.

But all of this comes crashing down around her when her twin brother, Billy, commits "suicide by police," after being charged with child abuse by his wife, Ashley.

Lila's world crashes with the death of Billy, and she ends up estranged from her husband, and hospitalized after a suicide attempt. It isn't only Lila's and Patrick's life that starts to disintegrate, but also Billy's children, and then their mother when her boyfriend is accused of child abuse.

Lila has never been able to remember much from her childhood, and she is compelled to try to piece together the nightmarish scraps. At the same time, Billy's daughter Pearl is trying to understand why Billy killed himself.

With no one trusting each other, the extended family members come together in a middle-of-the-night climactic scene that finally reveals the truth.

Engaging and well-written, this is a quick read. Those who enjoy classic literature will enjoy the literary references and allusions.

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### **Staci says**

I've read quite a few favorable reviews on this one that made me want to read it immediately. I'm always interested in family dramas and this book has all of that and then some. I knew right away that something wasn't right with Lila and her twin brother Billy, but it took some time before I could really figure out what their relationship was all about. I thought the writing was really strong and the story had elements of mystery that I enjoyed trying to figure out. In the end, I felt my heart going out to Lila and felt that maybe she would find some peace. However, I thought the ending was abrupt, strange, and left me with a bad taste in my mouth.

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### **Nicole says**

#### **3.5 stars**

That ending was pretty twisted! I didn't see that coming. If you enjoyed *Everything I Never Told You* then you would probably also like this novel. Both novels revolve around a family who must continue to survive after a loved one dies unexpectedly.

In *The Promised World*, we follow the lives of several characters dealing with the aftermath of the death of Lila's twin brother, Billy. The story is told from the perspective of Lila early on, but as the story progresses, the reader also gets a glimpse at the thoughts of Billy's children, Pearl and William, as well as Billy's wife, Ashley, and Lila's husband, Patrick. Billy's death has a profound effect on all these characters. Throughout the novel, they try to understand why he commits "suicide by police", leaving them all behind.

We find out in Lila's story that she had a troubled past, to the point where she doesn't remember much about her childhood. All she knows is that Billy was the only person who made her childhood bearable and helped her to start a new life as an adult. Billy's death forces Lila to look at her past. In the process, she begins to unravel. I was really moved by Lila's story in particular because I thought the relationship she shared with her brother was fascinating. The revelation at the end was quite disturbing but it made the story quite interesting.

I did have some issues with a few things, one of those being that some of the characters were pushed aside and "forgotten" by the end of the story. I wanted to know more about Ashley and Patrick and also the children. In the end, there was too much focus on Lila and not enough on any of the others.

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### **Colleen says**

This gripping tale of family secrets and shattered lives is both tragic and redemptive. When Billy commits suicide, his fraternal Lila is left shattered. Unable to understand Billy's actions or to piece together the

fractured pieces of her childhood without his help, Lila starts to separate from her life trying to piece together what happened in his. Meanwhile Billy's wife Ashley and Lila's husband Patrick dance around the edges of the picture, reintroducing Lila's mother Barbara to the family with almost tragic results.

Tucker is a masterful storyteller and this heartbreaking novel stretches those skills to the limits. I found the story haunting, and am still thinking about the revealed truths weeks later. Though the ending drifted toward the unbelievable, it didn't cross over the edge which could have ruined this wonderful novel. This novel pushes at the definitions of truth and memory, and explores the blurry lines that sometimes mask the two.

Highly recommended- this wonderful novel will stay with you long after you have finished reading.

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### **Nanette says**

3.5\* - Every now and then one may just be looking for a good drama story, and this would fit the bill. Every family has skeletons and this family is no different. Young children sometimes can't or won't remember their childhoods, and for good reason. The twins, Lila and Billy, each have different tales about growing up and will reflect on how they are living their lives as adults. Whose to blame?

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### **Patsy says**

I really enjoyed this book. It's a psycho-drama that kept me turning pages. It's not great literature and I still have unanswered questions but it's a good read!

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### **Deirdre says**

This engrossing tale delves deep into the power of memory and the often blurry lines between actual events and the stories we're told about those events. The focus of the book are Lila and Billy, a set of unusually close fraternal twins whose lives and stories are entwined more than anyone can imagine. After Billy's death Lila completely breaks down, leaving her husband Patrick - a man who has always valued reason and logic over emotion - to sift through what he knows and what he is told to piece together the truth about Lila and Billy's childhood.

Often poignant and incredibly readable, this novel was very well-written and I highly recommend it with 5 stars. Every family has its secrets, some more so than others - I think Tucker truly captured the quiet darkness that exists deep in the recesses of the human mind. She also tackled the very interesting topic of twins and the unique bonds they share, sometimes to the detriment of their other relationships. This book will make you think; it'll make you call your sibling or your mom; it will certainly make you want to read more from Lisa Tucker.

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### **Rosalind Gallaspie says**

The poorly conceived ending ruined this book for me.

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## Jeny says

I really enjoyed this book until I got to the end, where the author just kinda wrapped things but didn't really address everything in the book. After reading it, I was left with asking questions. I was really disappointed with the ending.

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## Mary says

When I read the book cover, it said something about how the book would haunt me after I finished the last page so I thought it would be a great ending. The book itself was ok, but the ending was pretty disappointing.

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## Tez says

**CONTENT WARNING:** Child abuse, gaslighting, maybe-incest, body-shaming, fat-phobia, controlling someone else's food-intake.

"Suicide-by-police" - what does it mean? Police shoot Billy dead. How is that suicide? Anyway, apparently Billy wants them to kill him, and he gets his wish. I think "suicide-by-police" needs way more exploring, because there's barely anything here.

The Promised World is contemporary Gothic, with themes of effed-up families, gaslighting, manipulation, maybe-incest, and a big helping of pretentiousness. Billy is basically "guy in your MFA" who thinks he's top stuff, and there's hell to pay if you don't agree with his opinions - not just regarding literature, but about anything and everything. Ugh, he's the worst, so reading Lila's praise for (and everyone's compliments about) him is so freaking annoying.

So Lila and Billy have an unhealthy bond, and it all goes back to their childhood - which Lila doesn't remember much of; instead, relying on what Billy tells her happened.

As for Billy's children, Pearl is very much a VCA-esque character when she lives with Barbara. Maisie's too young to be given a subplot. And middle child William has his life endangered several times by his father, in a series of events called the Challenges, of which we don't get enough detail.

This book should've been right up my alley, but the characterisation doesn't work. I feel sorry for the characters (especially Ashley, Billy's wife), but I don't particularly like any of them. And when characters talk about literature and stories... Too meta-wank for me.

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## Tattered Cover Book Store says

Jackie says:

"Words can be like arrows. You can't see them, and that's why they're so dangerous. With an ordinary arrow, if you get hit, you know you have to remove it from your body. With words, you can never pull them out once they get stuck in your mind."

This quote comes toward the end of this extraordinary novel, but it is its essence. At first it seems that this book is about a woman, Lila, dealing with the shocking 'suicide by cop' death of her twin, Billy. But that is simply the point where we jump into these two people's tangled, damaged, mystery shrouded lives. As Lila struggles to hold on to her own fragile sanity, her husband Patrick helps her to find out more of her past-- something that she has very little memory of prior to the age of 16. Billy had provided her with all of her memories before that without ever explaining why she could not remember herself. What emerges is a cycle of abuse that is threatening to take over yet another generation in the wake of Billy's death. This is a wrenching and complex story that is both difficult to read and impossible to put down and I recommend it VERY highly.

\*\*\*Unchain Yourself! Look for this great book at your local independent bookstore. There is a store finder at [indiebound.org](http://indiebound.org)\*\*\*

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## **Gayle says**

You know it's bad when you only have 15 pages left of a book, and you can't bring yourself to read them.

The Promised World by Lisa Tucker started out promising enough: a tale of family dysfunction focusing on twin brother/sister, Billy and Lila, who have an abnormally close relationship and a lot of unanswered questions about their past. When Billy kills himself – suicide by police – Lila tries to figure out why, and starts unraveling a lot of mysteries about their childhood and what she remembers. Meanwhile, Billy's three children each deal with their own issues in the aftermath of their father's death, and his estranged wife struggles to keep custody of her children.

My issues with this book:

Inconsistency. It seemed like Tucker just made up things as she went along, without a consistent narrative that tied all the facts together. Houses appear out of nowhere that are fully furnished, even though nobody has lived in them for years. Memories crop up, then fade away, and are then replaced by conflicting memories. Evidence points to certain events that are never addressed or brought up again. I realize that Lila's past was shadowy and confusing, but sometimes she has total clarity about events and other times she is missing decades of her past.

Plot developments that are supposed to be pivotal, but aren't. Billy supposedly shot his stepfather, but that is never really explored. Lila fell down the stairs and had a head injury, but that's also not really addressed until the last few pages, and then only with the briefest of treatments.

Overblown insinuations of incest and abuse. Did Lila and Billy have an inappropriate relationship? Maybe... it's hinted at but never really explored, and no one can agree on the answer. Did their stepfather abuse them? Maybe... but again, never resolved.

Unrealistically crazy and/or evil characters. Lila and Billy's mom is pure evil, and Billy himself is highly unstable and paranoid. And Lila did her own stint in a mental institution. Yet we are supposed to follow

these characters and relate to their perspective...?

The Promised World clearly wasn't for me. Maybe Tucker was trying to explore the nature of memory and who we trust in creating our own narratives? But there were holes all over the place that made it much more confusing than powerful. The only sane people in the book – Billy and Lila's spouses – were the only characters I could really follow and enjoy. The rest were just a mishmash of inconsistent or crazy.

I listened to The Promised World mostly on audio, until the last chapter, and I invested a lot of hours into it. (The audio is decent, through the narrator was a little too precise and prim – almost like she was reading a children's book – which was inconsistent with the overall mood of her material.) By the end, I was annoyed with the book, bordering on angry, and really wishing I hadn't spent my time on it. I have too little time to read these days to spend it on books that are this unsatisfying. Ultimately this one wasn't worth it.

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## **Wendy says**

In today's climate, with the news full of stories men turning to mass murder and suicide, The Promised World seems an even more fitting book for the times. Unlike the men in the news stories, however, Billy Cole had no intention of killing anyone other than himself the day he aimed his unloaded rifle at an elementary school. His pain had become too much for him to bear. Lisa Tucker offers a firsthand look at a family in crisis and the impact suicide can have on such a family.

Billy had been everything to his twin sister, Lila. Billy was her hero and her mentor. He had been her support for many years, nurturing her and rescuing her from a past she has no memory of. Billy was the person who filled in the gaps of her memory and inspired her love for books. His death shattered not only her heart, but her world as well--everything she thought she knew and believed suddenly came into question. Lila's husband could only watch his wife unravel before him, unsure of what to do and how to help her. His wife was not quite the woman he thought she was. What seemed to be a perfect marriage, suddenly was falling apart.

Billy's death left his own family, his three children and estranged wife, confused and angry. His teenage daughter, Pearl, wants to understand her father and why he would do such a terrible thing. William, Billy's 8 year old son, continues to hang on to the promises he made to his father, wanting to make him proud even after death. Ashley had loved Billy but also been afraid of him. He was the perfect father one minute but his mood swings and secretiveness proved more than the couple could bear.

I was intrigued when I first read the description of this novel and jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the book tour. The Promised World sounded liked something I would like. And it certainly was. I was especially mesmerized by the momentum the author built as the story went along. I was caught up in the downward spiral leading up to the climax, wondering where the author would take me next. How much worse could it get for this family as they struggled to come to terms with the past and move forward in their own lives?

I went back and forth in my opinions of the characters, sometimes liking them and sometimes wondering what the heck they were thinking. Each was flawed, dealing with a catastrophic event that would scar anyone in his or her shoes. Everyone dealt with Billy's death in different ways. Still, they all felt a similar pain and anger, and even the shame. My heart especially when out to the children.



There is so much to this novel. The author took on the issue of child abuse, looking at it from varying angles: from false allegations to the lasting damage and impact of long time abuse. The novel also delved into the fragility of memory--how easily it can be manipulated or colored by perception and time or forgotten all together, repressed. Secrecy also plays a role in *The Promised World*. Billy and Lila kept their past well hidden. They lied to those they loved. When the truth came out, was it any wonder their loved ones felt betrayed?

Lila and Billy both shared a love for books. There are many book references that will attract fellow book lovers. Lila used books as an escape from her past, and most especially to keep her memories from overwhelming her, however unconscious that may be. "I'm a great believer in stories. I used to tell Billy I was afraid we loved stories more than real life, but he said, 'What is life but a story we don't know the meaning of yet?'" [pg 10:]

It was not until a few hours after I had finished reading *The Promised World* that I could fully appreciate all the author had set out to accomplish. While on the surface, the novel is entertaining and a page turner, in its depths it is a story about lost innocence, betrayal and the complexity of relationships.

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