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Hustvedt, Siri. The Summer Without Men

It?s the rare book that can consider weighty themes without a bleak tone and plot. As readers we?re often forced to choose between literary fiction that borders on the morose and lighter fare that can feel like a waste of time. Not so with Siri Hustvedt?s new novel, *Summer without Men.* Hustvedt manages to examine everything from adolescent bullying to the potential grief and loneliness of old age in a charming novel that never seems depressing thanks to the wry humor of the first person narrator, Mia.

Newly separated after nearly thirty years of marriage and fresh from a brief stint in a psychiatric hospital, Mia returns to her hometown where she balances an intense introspection about her past (and life in general)with an interest in an array of women, including her young poetry students, a troubled neighbor, and her mother?s elderly friends. Mia?s compassion for these women allows her to revisit the various stages of her own life while directly addressing the reader and offering numerous asides and literary quotes and allusions regarding love and loss. Throughout Mia?s sense of humor charms the reader. She shares fantasies of releasing the rats in her husband?s lab and refers to his new girlfriend as ?the Pause? and ?unnamed French love object.?

Summer without Men is a quick, quirky read served up by one of the more engaging narrators in recent memory.

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