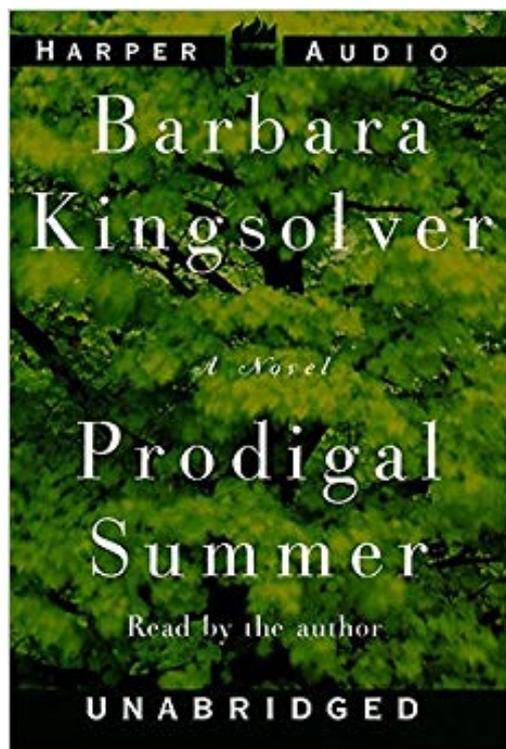


Prodigal Summer by Barbara Kingsolver



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Triumphing once again, Barbara Kingsolver has written a beautiful new novel: a hymn to wildness that celebrates the prodigal spirit of human nature, and of nature itself

Prodigal Summer weaves together three stories of human love within a larger tapestry of lives in southern Appalachia. At the heart of these intertwined narratives is a den of coyotes that have recently migrated into the region. Deanna Wolfe, a reclusive wildlife biologist, watches them from an isolated mountain cabin where she is caught off-guard by Eddie Bondo, a young hunter who comes to invade her most private spaces and her solitary life. Down the mountain, another web of lives unfolds as Lusa Maluf Landowski, a bookish city girl turned farmer's wife, finds herself in a strange place where she must declare or lose her attachment to the land that has become her own. And a few more miles down the road, a pair of elderly, feuding neighbors tend their respective farms and wrangle about God, pesticides, and the possibilities the future holds.

Over the course of one long summer, these characters find connections to one another, and to the land, and the final, urgent truth that humans are only one piece of life on earth.

Read by the author.



Reviews of the **Prodigal Summer** by Barbara Kingsolver

- **FEISKO**

In *Prodigal Summer*, Barbara Kingsolver masterfully delivers three narratives which begin in late spring, wind through the burgeoning summer of an Appalachian mountain and valley, and come together as autumn raises its cooler head. Deanna is a 38-year-old, divorced, childless forest warden who has come to love being alone in her woods near the top of the mountain that overlooks Zebulon Valley; she is determined to stay that way until a stranger comes along with the buds of May. Lusa, a "foreigner" of Polish descent from Lexington (Kentucky or Virginia), left her university post to marry Cole Widener, a farmer in the Valley whose land no longer supports them. When Lusa the bride becomes Lusa the young widow, she has to figure out whether she wants to stay among these people and how to make a living farming in a valley where the last successful crop was tobacco.

Septuagenarians Nannie Rawley and Garnett Walker are next-door neighbors who hold exactly opposite views of life; every day brings another battle at the fence that separates their land. These stories keep time with the riotous summer; they teach that life will be created and will continue in spite of the odds. At times, Kingsolver gets a little didactic--as these people of the Valley would say, "preachy-teachy"--having her characters deliver lectures or engage in arguments about the environment, the ecosystem, and the food chain. There are also more subtle lessons, though: farmers who can't compete in the food market, stay in debt, and end up driving delivery trucks or working at the new auto plant far away. But life keeps going. It simply has to. At least these people have each other. About Kingsolver's prose: When I began to look back over the book to find a good example, I started reading the book all over again; it's that good. I would like to offer this one passage (it's not a spoiler): "When the rain and thunder died and the wind had gone quiet, coyotes began to howl from the ridge top. With voices that rose and broke and trembled with clean, astonished joy, they raised up their long blue harmony against the dark sky. Not a single voice in the darkness, but two: a mated pair in the new world, having the last laugh." You can read the rest of the good stuff for yourself.

- **Kazijora**

"*Prodigal Summer*" showcases some of Barbara Kingsolver's loveliest descriptive prose but is hampered by too many characters preaching their gospel of environmentalism. I love the social conscience exhibited in all of Kingsolver's work but having not just one but three characters driving home her message of environmental responsibility stole some of the magic from her solid storytelling.

The novel unfolds through alternating chapters about three characters living on the land in rural Appalachia. Deanna is a park ranger with a passion for nature living alone on a mountain until a hunter who might as well be called Fantasy Man shows up. Lusa is a young woman adjusting to widowhood and her in-laws while struggling to find an earth-friendly way to make her farm solvent. Garnett Walker is an "old fart" with little patience for the independence and organic methods of his neighbor even while he struggles to revive the American chestnut trees on his own property. Each chapter deftly advances these three stories and ends in cliffhangers that made me want to read on. Ultimately, the author reveals how all the characters are connected.

Throughout, Kingsolver offers lush descriptions of the beauty and fecundity of nature in summertime while her characters deal with the human desires unleashed by the season. Her prose is superb. After a hard rain, the dripping leaves of the forest echo with a "sibilant percussion." A blacksnake "oozed" down the wall of a log cabin "in an undulating flow like a line of molasses spilling over the edge of a pitcher." The plotting and pace are excellent and I laughed out loud quite a few times at

funny observations or situations. My only problem is that too many characters descend into long-winded lectures on the necessity for humans to adopt more earth-friendly environmental practices. A lighter touch would have conveyed that important message more effectively and made this a sleeker, superior 5 star book.

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