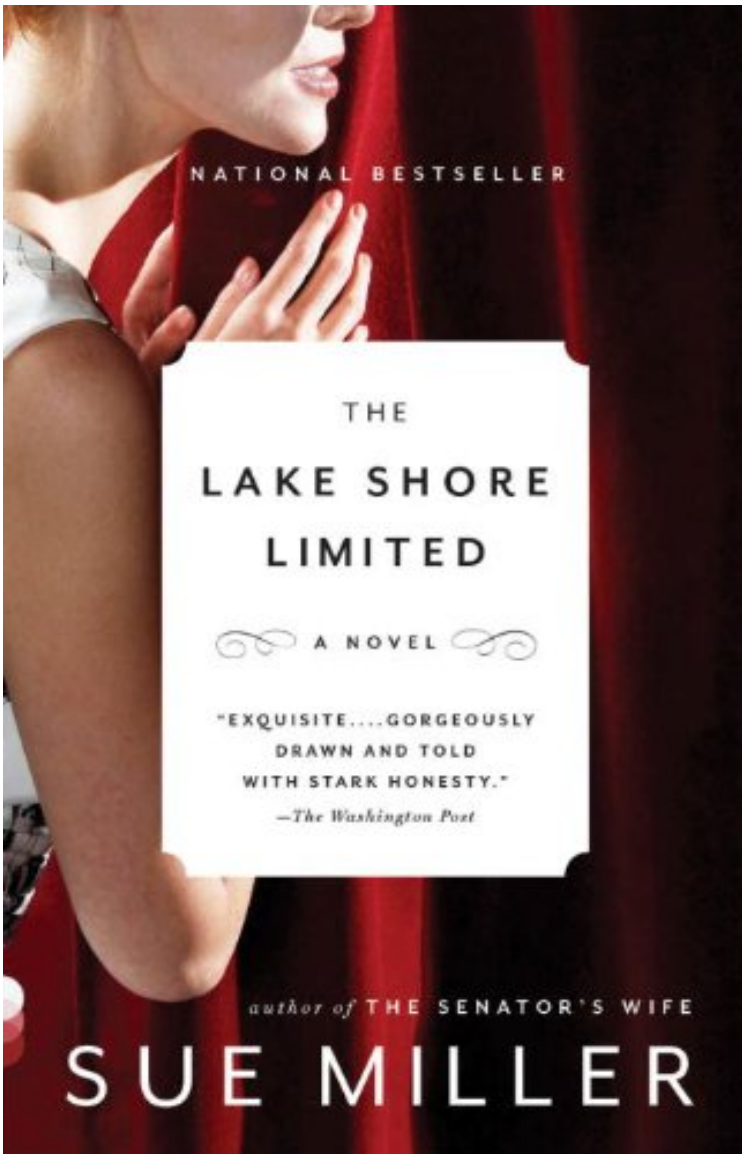


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The Lake Shore Limited



Par Sue Miller
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFour unforgettable characters beckon you into this spellbinding new novel from Sue Miller, the author of 2008's heralded best seller *The Senator's Wife*. First among them is Wilhelmina Billy Gertz, small as a child, fiercely independent, powerfully committed to her work as a playwright. The story itself centers on *The Lake Shore Limited* a play Billy has written about an imagined terrorist bombing of that train as it pulls into Union Station in Chicago, and about a man waiting to hear the fate of his estranged wife, who is traveling on it. Billy had waited in just such a way on 9/11 to hear whether her lover, Gus, was on one of the planes used in the attack. The novel moves from the snow-filled woods of Vermont to the rainy brick sidewalks of Boston as the lives of the other characters intersect and interweave

with Billys: Leslie, Guss sister, still driven by grief years after her brothers death; Rafe, the actor who rises to greatness in a performance inspired by a night of incandescent lovemaking; and Sam, a man irresistibly drawn to Billy after he sees the play that so clearly displays the terrible conflicts and ambivalence of her situation. How Billy has come to create the play out of these emotions, how it is then created anew on the stage, how the performance itself touches and changes the other characters lives these form the thread that binds them all together and drives the novel compulsively forward. A powerful love story; a mesmerizing tale of entanglements, connections, and inconsolable losses; a marvelous reflection on the meaning of grace and the uses of sorrow, in life and in art: *The Lake Shore Limited* is Sue Miller at her dazzling best. From the Hardcover edition.

Extrait Because it was still afternoon, because she was in a strange room, because she was napping rather than sleeping (Ill just lie down for a bit and see what happens, shed told Pierce) because of all this, she was aware of herself as she dreamed, at some level conscious of working to subvert the dream she was having, to make it come out another way, different from the way it seemed to be headed. She was trying to get to Gus, that was the idea. Somehow she knew that he was far away and by himself, that he was in trouble. It was one of those dreams of turning wrong corners, of ending up in nightmare neighborhoods or in twisting empty corridors, of searching in vain. A dream of haste, too. Yes, now she understood that she was late, terribly late. She was trying to run, but her legs were thick and heavy, hard to move. Oh, this is classic, she thought, floating over the whole mess. This is so predictable. Lets not, she thought. And it worked. For here was Gus, suddenly, conjured by her, shoved into the dream where he wasnt yet supposed to be she still had miles to go. He looked younger than hed been when last shed seen him in life. He was smiling fondly at her. Im sorry to be late, she said. This came out oddly because, she realized abruptly, she was weeping. Oh, youre always late, he said, carelessly, affectionately; and she woke up. It simply wasnt true, what hed said she was never late and this accusation, even so lightly made, this was the part of the dream that left her most disconcerted. She lay in the wide bed, the sensation of weeping still with her in her throat, her chest and looked around the room. The hotel room. They were in Boston, in an expensive hotel overlooking the Public Garden. She had booked it. She had even specified the floor high up enough to be looking across into the trees. It must have been four-thirty or later, she thought. It was dusky outside and the room was deep in shadows. She could hear voices in the hall, the women who turned down the beds, most likely. They were lingering, chatting out there. It was a language she couldnt understand, full of guttural sounds. Portuguese maybe. A jewel-bright stripe of light glowed at the bottom of the door. One of them laughed. She was alone in the room. Pierce had gone to the Museum of Fine Arts, to a show she had read about in the paper and suggested to him she wanted him to have something to do in the city that he enjoyed, too. It was a show of Japanese prints called the *Floating World*, prints of the life of the theater and the world of courtesans from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Apparently it included some never-before-displayed erotica, described as fantastic in its inventiveness. It was on account of this that shed recommended it to Pierce. Just his cup of tea, shed said to him. Youre sure you dont want to go? hed asked as he was about to leave. Youre not drawn by the prospect of those immense members being waved about? He swung his arm wide. Poked here and there? I get my fill of immense members at home. I dont need to go to the MFA for that. He had smiled, surprised at her, and then taken a formal bow before he exited, wearing his old tweed overcoat. She had told him recently that he looked like a panhandler in it and he did, even when he was wearing the fancy leather gloves shed given him for his birthday, as he had been today. He didnt care, hed said. And we could always use the dough. He would be back soon, she supposed. She should get up and try to make herself look more presentable. But she didnt right away. She lay with her eyes closed, thinking of the version of Gus she had invented in the dream. Why do we alter them in the way we do? Why make him so young, so happy? Erasing it, she supposed. The way hed died. The awfulness of it. Its solitariness, as she thought of it, though hed hardly been alone. Gus was her brother, younger by fourteen years. He would have been forty-five now if hed lived. Hed died six years earlier. For the most part shed stopped thinking, or even dreaming, about the moment of his death, the exact way it happened, which she was grateful for. But she still dreamed of him, and she was grateful for this, too. In this afternoons dream he seemed to have been in his early twenties handsome, smiling, teasing her. That was his age at the point in their lives when theyd been closest. Before then she hadnt paid much attention to him, he was so much younger four years old when she went off to college, eleven when she married. But a few years after that, when Gus was still in high school and she and Pierce were first living in New Hampshire, their parents divorced and things changed. Their father moved to California and disappeared, though for a few years he still called her occasionally late at night mid evening his time loaded, weepy, full of useless and temporarily felt love. The first few times he did this she had

stayed on the phone with him as long as he wanted to talk. She had imagined finding some way back to the affection that had existed between them when she was a girl. But nothing happened as a result of the calls, nothing changed. They began and ended the same way each time, as if he had no memory of the one before. And probably he didn't. Probably he had some vague notion when he woke the next day that he'd talked to someone he knew. Maybe he even remembered it was Leslie. But he clearly remembered nothing specific—not the promises to visit, not the pleas for forgiveness. In the end she started turning off the phone when she and Pierce went to bed. Their mother moved into a one-bedroom apartment after the divorce, and Gus slept on a daybed in the living room. When he went away to college, she gave the bed to the Salvation Army and bought a real couch—she was tired of not having what she called a decent place to entertain—and that became Gus's bed when he was home. She was dating by then, and often didn't come back to the apartment at night at all, so Gus would wake alone in the morning, fix his own breakfast, and start calling his old high school friends for company. Pretty quickly he stopped going home on school vacations and began to come instead to stay with her, to stay in the house just across the river into Vermont that she and Pierce had bought a few years after he got the job at Dartmouth-Hitchcock. They gave a room over to him, and he slowly began to accumulate stuff in it—books, sports equipment, records and tapes and posters. After college, he'd gone to work in Boston, but he still came home regularly home to Pierce and Leslie's house. It was over these years that Leslie came to know him, to love him as a person, not just as the cute little brother. She understood that some of this had to do with her inability to get pregnant, for those were also the years when she and Pierce were trying, and failing, to have children. She was, she supposed, depressed most of that time. At any rate, she felt she was learning how deeply life can disappoint you, how all that's good can become bad for she and Pierce had turned away from each other then, and why not, when the most joyous, intimate connection between them had become enforced, more or less a topic for public discussion with doctors, with nurses—a matter simply of successful or unsuccessful function. Unsuccessful, as it turned out. And here came Gus, so sunny, so full of his boyish eagerness for life, so assured that all would always be well for him, that luck would follow him everywhere. He had a friend from college, Peter, who was also working in Boston, and he sometimes came up with Gus on weekends, or for holidays. The fun boys, they called themselves. And they were fun. The smallest things delighted them. Her maternal fussiness, which Gus had once stopped by imitating a hen's clucking back at her. The response of an orderly, careful friend when they called to ask him to join them at a bar: You mean . . . now? When one or both of them were visiting, Leslie would stay up late playing Yahtzee or Monopoly, watching Johnny Carson, drinking, laughing. Lying in the gray fading light of the hotel room now, she was remembering going for a walk with Gus in a snowstorm around midnight one night over a Christmas holiday. They had been talking in the living room and seen the flakes suddenly thicken dramatically in the lighted air outside the windows. Let's go, he said, and without hesitation she pulled on her boots, her parka, her mittens, and stepped outside with him. She could feel it again now, she could call it up so clearly, the sense she had then of being enclosed in a private world with her brother—the flakes a kind of particulate blur, the ground beneath them turning quickly white, the rest of the world silenced and remote. I am so happy, she had thought. And part of that was the dearness to her of Gus, and the sense of how precious she was to him. When she had come in later and gone upstairs to her bedroom—her and Pierce's bedroom—it felt musty, closed in, the noise of Pierce's slow breathing in sleep somehow oppressive. All of this, she saw now and actually knew even then—borne of loss. Made possible by their parents moving off separately into their lives, by Pierce's retreat from her during these years, by her own feelings of failure and the resultant wish to live once again with a sense of possibility. Or near a sense of possibility, at any rate. Near Gus. Possibility. She whispered the word aloud into the twilight air of the hotel room. And smiled, looking up at the shadowed ceiling, at the steady pass of headlights across it. Possibility. What a funny, crotchety-sounding word for something so humanly necessary. But was it necessary? She turned on her side in bed. Were there people, everywhere, who lived without it? Who didn't imagine anything other than what was? She thought not. She thought everyone needed some sense that things would be better, might be better, soon. Or one day. She thought of immigrants, the way they worked two or three jobs to make something different possible for their children. It seemed one always wanted better for one's children. That was surely one version of it—possibility. Perhaps one wanted better for oneself, too. Perhaps even for one's religious group: the world converted to Christianity. The caliphate restored, spread. One hundred virgins waiting for you. She sat up. Her mouth tasted sour, fuzzy. She fumbled for the switch to the lamp on the bedside table. When it came on, the window snapped to black, and here it was, the lushly carpeted room—the heavy, striped curtains at the window, the solid, dark, expensive-yet-undistinguished furniture,

furniture such as no one would ever have in a real home. She got up and went into the vast marbled bathroom. She brushed her teeth. Afterward she took a long look at herself in the mirror over the double sink, and then at her image reflected, multiplied smaller and smaller, in the full-length mirror hung on the opened bathroom door behind her. She turned this way and that. The image she was used to, the one that faced her over the sink and the countertop, seemed much as it had for years. Different in some ways, of course her hair was almost all white now, and she was heavier, certainly yet still recognizably herself. But in the unfamiliar angles, the reversed versions she could see reflected again and again in the doorway mirror, she recognized what she didn't usually have to confront that she was getting old. Her face was set and sagging. The flesh of her neck and arms looked tired, crepey. Her hips were shapeless. Worst was that she was increasingly looking like her mother her mouth drawn down sourly into an inverted U, the flesh at her jowls pouched. This bothered her more than anything. She thought of her mother, of taking care of her in her old age. When she'd gone to visit her, to take her for a walk or a drive or out to lunch, her mother would have dressed herself carefully, she would be wearing makeup, her eyes done heavily and with an unsteady hand that made her look, Leslie always thought, like the David Levine cartoon of the elderly Colette. Clearly the point of all that effort was to look attractive, and, most of all, to look attractive for Leslie. She wanted to be pleasing to her daughter. She imagined that they'd reconciled, she assumed that Leslie's thoughtful caring for her was a sign of that. She was wrong. Leslie held every small kindness she performed for her mother against her. Every single generous act was a kind of dagger. A shiv, Leslie thought. How mean she was, really! She didn't have the courage to act on it, but she was. She didn't like it in herself. Now she went to the closet by the door to the hall and got her coat. She had to search the room's surfaces for the plastic key card. It was on the bureau, under her purse. She would buy some flowers. A big bouquet for the room, to make it feel more theirs. Pierce would like that she could picture his surprised face, opening in delight. And then it occurred to her that she should get something smaller, too, something she could easily take with her tonight perhaps rosebuds, she thought. Rosebuds for Billy, for after the play. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Ms. Miller not only conveys the subjectivity of all experience but also succeeds in creating a haunting chamber-music piece with many different solos. . . . Its power grows from Ms. Miller's intimate understanding of her characters . . . and from her Chekhovian understanding of missed connections, lost opportunities, and closely held memories that mutate slowly over time. . . . Ms. Miller gives us a knowing meditation upon the acts of alchemy and theft that constitute an artist's work: a meditation that sheds light on her own craft, so meticulously showcased in this novel. Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* Miller's exquisite new novel, *The Lake Shore Limited*, is so sophisticated and thoughtful that it should either help redeem the term women's literature or free her from it once and for all. . . . Gorgeously drawn and told with stark honesty. . . . Intellectual and emotional . . . profound and unsettling. . . . [A] miracle. Ron Charles, *The Washington Post* Quintessential Miller, touching on the themes that have animated her fiction for the past quarter-century: the potency of sex; the failure of men and women to understand each other; the hunger for a different life. Ligaya Mishan, *The New York Times Book Review* Miller has written gripping novels that shrewdly tap the domestic zeitgeist. *Lake Shore*, set between snowy Vermont and brick-lined Boston, continues the trend, exploring the fragility of love and life in the post-9/11 era. . . . [A] play-within-the-novel adds a layer of complexity to Miller's latest tale, another graceful, poignant romance that resonates with the times. Joanna Powell, *People* With the surety of a master, Miller reveals the intersection of love and fate. *Good Housekeeping* An ensemble novel about love, loss, and the discontents of middle age. *Elle* (Fiction pick of the month, *The Elle's Lettres Readers Prize*) An ambitious exploration of the interaction between choice and random chance in human relationships. . . . Miller raises tantalizing questions about the ethics of love. Kirkus Miller's take on post-9/11 America is fascinating and perfectly balanced with her writerly meditations on the destructiveness of trauma and loss, and the creation and experience of art. *Publishers Weekly* Expertly written, this novel plumbs the dark depths of grief and guilt but emerges into the light of self-forgiveness and freedom. Recommended. Jyna Scheeren, *Library Journal* As the narrative among four different perspectives, Miller ever so slowly builds to a deeply affecting series of emotional revelations. Among the many heady themes Miller tackles the joys and burdens of making art, the wish for a different, unencumbered life is the relationships between men and women that elicit her most piercing insights and elegant turns of phrase. . . . An eloquent, layered meditation on the complexities of the human heart. Joanne Wilkinson, *Booklist* From the Hardcover edition.