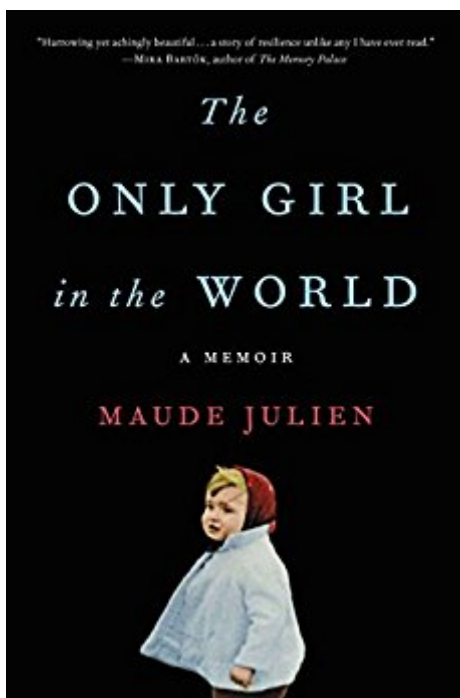


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The Only Girl In The World: A Memoir



Synopsis

For readers of *Room* and *The Glass Castle*, a memoir to be read in one breathless sitting that will leave you astonished by the courage and creative power of even the most neglected soul. Maude Julien's parents were fanatics who believed it was their sacred duty to turn her into the ultimate survivor - raising her in isolation, tyrannizing her childhood and subjecting her to endless drills designed to "eliminate weakness." Maude learned to hold an electric fence for minutes without flinching, and to sit perfectly still in a rat-infested cellar all night long (her mother sewed bells onto her clothes that would give her away if she moved). She endured a life without heat, hot water, adequate food, friendship, or any kind of affectionate treatment. But Maude's parents could not rule her inner life. Befriending the animals on the lonely estate as well as the characters in the novels she read in secret, young Maude nurtured in herself the compassion and love that her parents forbid as weak. And when, after more than a decade, an outsider managed to penetrate her family's paranoid world, Maude seized her opportunity. By turns horrifying and magical, *The Only Girl in the World* is a story that will grip you from the first page and leave you spellbound, a chilling exploration of psychological control that ends with a glorious escape.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“My father finds laughter extremely irritating. He sees it as a waste of energy, proof of a total lack of control. Smiling finds no favour in his eyes either. “Do you want to be the village idiot?” he asks if he catches me gazing up at the sky with a smile on my face. “Only halfwits smile. Your face must be serious and expressionless in order to confuse your adversaries. Never reveal anything.”

The Only Girl In The World is a memoir by French psychotherapist, Maude Julien, in collaboration with French journalist, Ursula Gauthier. When she was three years old, Maude’s father, Louis Didier liquidated his assets and bought a house near Cassel where he took his wife and daughter to live in virtual isolation from the world around them. Thereafter, Maude’s upbringing was strictly regimented, physically demanding and devoid of human love and affection, in accordance with her father’s grand plan to raise a superhuman being. By seven years of age, Maude already recognised that “I belong to my parents. I am their thing. There is no place for life inside me or around me.”

She is regularly subjected to Meditation on Death in a dark cellar: “My eyes frantically probe the darkness. Only my ears can make anything out, and what they hear propels me into an abyss of terror. A host of sinister noises, little animals moving around in the dark, scurrying, running, stopping, rummaging and scuttling off again. I’m screaming inside, but no sound comes out because my lips are clamped shut and quivering. My father told me that if I open my mouth, mice or even rats will sense it and will climb up me, get into my mouth and eat me from the inside.” I worry that the mice might be able to get in through my ears. But if I cover them with my hands, I won’t hear anything, I’ll be blind and deaf.

At eight years old: “I sleep for six and a half hours, and work or study for fifteen or sixteen hours.” Maude is subjected to Tough pedagogy: “All distractions must be eliminated. I have to learn to sleep as little as possible, because sleep is a waste of time. I also have to cope without any of life’s pleasures, starting with delights for the tastebuds, which are the surest route to weakness.” For the sake of my training, I also have to respect special rules, like never eating fresh bread. My portion of the bread we bake every two weeks is systematically set aside to go stale.

Given the choice of a calendar at Christmas, she hesitates before choosing, prompting this lecture: “Choosing has nothing to do with pleasure. Only the weak hesitate and take pleasure in choosing. Life isn’t about pleasure, it’s a merciless struggle. If you show someone what gives you pleasure, you’re revealing your vulnerability, and that person will take advantage of

them to crush you. As the reader progresses through Maude's account of her childhood and adolescence, it becomes patently clear that her father is delusional, but still manages to wield great power over his wife and daughter, indoctrinating them both with his bizarre ideas. That Maude survives with her sanity intact is no spoiler; the role that her animals, her music and her own determination to survive play in that outcome make for a fascinating and inspirational read. The text is flawlessly translated from French by Adriana Hunter, and the author's note to her English readers forms an important endnote.

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