



# Alaska

*Sue Saliba*

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**Alaska** Sue Saliba

Mia's heart made a sound that no one heard except for Mia late one night when she woke from dreams into darkness.

Ethan was asleep beside her, and Em was a forest away. Outside it was night and dark and Alaska. The sky was upside down.

When Mia follows her sister halfway across the world to Alaska, she discovers that love can be found in the most unexpected and beautiful of places. But can Mia find the courage to follow her heart in Alaska? And what if the one you love is not all that you wish them to be?

## Alaska Details

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Author : Sue Saliba

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# From Reader Review Alaska for online ebook

## Nomes says

4.5 stars

alaska is a gorgeous, gorgeous book. it's breathless and aching and it completely captures that swirl of coming-of-age emotions. the fear and hope and vulnerability we all feel. the fleeting moments of deep happiness pitched against the uncertainties of the world and your place in it.

it's a contemp but written in such a lyrical way that it occasionally has an other-worldly vibe: it's whimsical. sue saliba's prose is stunning ~ she catches sentiments in the most aching of ways. the story washes over you, pulls you in, makes you gasp and sigh.

it was as if she was on the cusp of herself, her edges, and she might soon fall in. (p 172)

it's not written traditionally. there are no capital letters. there's snippets of scenes and snatches of dialogue. the narrative flows along, mostly linear, but at times swirling back through time.

i loved, adored and ached for mia. looking at the world through her eyes was stunning. she's carving out her place in the world:

whether he (ethan) knew it or not, she was casting him in a role, building a story around him, creating a tone. it was what she'd done for herself: mia, the devoted sister of em; mia, the emotional daughter of her alcoholic mother. what particular places she inhabited. what awful territory she guarded. (p16)

plot-wise i will not spoil it for you ~ but mia stumbles across things she cannot ignore. things that stir her and shape her and give her courage to find what she believes in:

suddenly mia wanted to stop, to reverse things. to walk back to the door and the time that she had just slipped through it, that moment. but she couldn't. something else was saying go, go deeper into what is here. right here with you.

she paused. she thought of the night-time sky. it was beautiful and terrifying all at once, seductive like standing on the edge of a truth where everything thought impossible was instantly and completely available. she moved forward. (p 61)

mia is brave and resilient. she's running away from melbourne and her past but also trying to come to terms with it. she falls in love with ethan, in his twenties, who feels like an extension of herself, but he is also

evasive and maybe not at all who she needs him to be.

there they lay, hours later, on the floor not far from the table but amongst blankets and cushion that ethan had dragged from the nearby couch. mia turned her head to look through the long window. she saw the road she had travelled along in the distance. she saw ice against the ground and the sunlight shining on it and she smiled at the strange combination of things. how just at that moment, as she looked out, with the comfort of ethan beside her, she could accept the unlikeliness of the world. (p 76)

i also keenly felt the relationship between mia and her mum. all that it was and is and all that mia wished it to be. the issue of her mum's illness was captured so deftly. in so few words there are so many shades of grey.

the setting of alaska is breathtaking. the forest is alive, it feels magical. it's right at the heartbeat of the novel.

you can't have beauty without danger. mia's words had sprung from somewhere covered over in her, whispered alive by the forest. you can't have life and absolute safety. (p92)

i could quote this entire book. it's sentiments, the language. this is a book with a soul. one more passage i loved for it's simplicity and it's heartbeat and for that sense of life and hope and the future and everything in between:

that night she lay beside ethan,  
mia's heart made a sound  
that no one else heard.

she was here in alaska, with ethan, with em. safe from certain parts of the world and certain parts of herself.

here - if she chose - was a certain story.

or she could listen to another way.

outside it was night and dark and the sky was upside down. the forest called to her. why had she come? what was it that a world so remote had to tell her.

it wasn't hard to know. not now. (p 182)

recommended: books like alaska make me fiercely proud of the aussie authors who write for our teens. this book is brave and true and full of heart and soul.

it's for fans of Jaclyn Moriarty's whimsical and soulful characters (think elizabeth clarry).

it's for fans of sonya hartnett's astounding prose and mystical stories.

it's for fans of verse novels ~ with it's lilting and lyrical prose.

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## **Tressa says**

**Alaska** was dreamy--like a fairy tale. There were no true answers, though, in the story.

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## **Reynje says**

### **3.5 stars**

Some books shout from the page, strident and bold, demanding to be heard.

Other books whisper in your ear. Almost as if to say: '*Come closer. I have something to tell you.*' So you lean in, sink into the words, and let yourself be submerged.

Alaska is one of the latter. It is a quiet, seemingly simple story, with great emotional depth beneath the plot. The prose is spare, yet somehow heavy – every sentence feels deliberate and significant, each word carefully chosen, rich with meaning. There is something almost dream-like about the experience of reading this book – the lyrical flow, the delicate handling of the dialogue, the beauty of the language.

While the lack of capitalisation, the short paragraphs and the shifts from past to present initially take some getting used to, they feel fitting for the unfolding of Mia's story.

Travelling from Australia to Alaska in the wake of her mother's hospitalisation, Mia discovers love and beauty – in people and her surroundings – and must ultimately decide whether to follow her heart, whatever direction it may lead her in.

The subjects of alcoholism, depression, romantic and familial love – and the way Mia perceives these – are explored honestly without being heavy handed or melodramatic. In particular, the passages that deal with mental illness feel achingly real and insightful. While yet a young woman beginning to figure out her way into the future and experiencing all the accompanying uncertainty, it is here that Mia shows her depth of understanding and empathy.

I loved how the aspect of distance was explored in Mia's relationships, both geographically and emotionally, and what it means to be close to someone. Or to discover that someone may not be exactly who or what we believe (or want) them to be. The bonds between Mia and her mother and sister, from childhood to the present, were a little bit heartbreaking in their realism.

Alaska is a gentle story of a girl's self-discovery through connection with her surroundings and finding something to believe in. It's a moving portrayal of courage and what it means to love. Absolutely beautiful.

(I also have to mention the cover. It is stunning - I keep picking it up and tilting it in the light. Perfect for the

story within.)

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## **Erin says**

Mia is so self indulgent and whiney and just generally the worst. I kept wanting bad things to happen to her (like with the car or the boy). At least that would have been interesting. I wouldn't have finished this book if it wasn't a book club one.

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## **Cass - Words on Paper says**

4.5/5

The first thing someone should notice when looking at this book is, "Wow! What a cover!" Really, just look at it in person. There is a subtle shininess in the bronze colouring. There is such attention to detail that it's one of those books that I could just stare at for minutes on end. And the barcode at the back is integrated in the cover image, which is really neat and blends in astonishingly well. Also, the cover features three animals - a deer, an owl and a wolf. They're all actually significant to the plot, which I found a nice surprise.

In *ALASKA*, 18 year old Mia has followed her older sister from the now-hopeless Melbourne to Alaska. Em has her own family now, and Mia feels as though she's been left in the dust. But then she finds love, and it's more real and frightening than anything she's ever experienced before. Trouble is ahead, when a certain project threatens the life she's wanted more than anything to have -- quoted, "a passionate story of love, family and the power of the natural world."

I loved how atmospheric the prose was - it leaps and bounds, free from the restraints of capital letters and rules. There is also this quiet intensity about it that invites you into Mia's world, into Alaska. The very setting of the book makes it a great winter read, a clever decision on Penguin's part to release it right on the cusp of winter.

"mia looked out at the road as they drew closer to em's house. the trees were almost sticks. winter was approaching. change was relentless." (p. 82)

Saliba's characters were surprisingly well-written given the length of the book. There was potential for a detachment with the main character, Mia, due to the third person narration. But Saliba wrote with her voice and thoughts in mind, and it was as almost as though she were in fact telling the story. I found Em, Mia's sister, a bit perplexing. Her behaviours towards their mum and Mia, and her 'new family': Terrence and Christian, show the complexities in relationships and what family can mean to one person as opposed to another. I loved the way Saliba delves into this topic, especially because family tends to take a spot behind romances, and that was so not the case, at least for me.

Ethan remains mysterious for the majority of the book. I kept shifting my opinion towards him, and even

after finishing the book I'm not sure just HOW I'm supposed to think of him.

ALASKA is a prime exploration of the intricacies in family, love, home and belonging and its quiet prose both captivates and vividly illustrates the atmosphere that would be expected of the place of Alaska. The characters, beautifully developed and realistically portrayed, in that, nothing is absolute in a person and perceptions change. I have no doubt that Sue Saliba's deftly crafted book has the power to inspire young adults to find themselves in their own Alaska.

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### **SanaBanana says**

rating: 2.5

this book was quite weird in the fact that the writing style was one i haven't really seen before. there was absolutely no capital letters at all, and it just kinda made the story seem so soft and dulled any blows swung in the story line. i feel like the book didn't really go anywhere even though important issues were raised, such as preserving our environment, but nothing really happened. it just kinda fell flat for me. the things i did enjoy however, was the overall setting, it makes me wanna go to alaska and get lost in the wild and i also liked that the story wasn't pointless, it had a valuable message in it. i just found it a pity that nothing was really done. the story had such a defeated air around it, i didn't like those vibes.

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### **old account (rl) says**

Have you ever read a book that, upon completion, you've had to sit back and think what the hell did I just read? ... because that's what happened to me here.

I don't know what Alaska was meant to achieve but I certainly didn't get anything out of it. I guess it was meant to be lyrical and poetic. Why else would you purposely leave out all the capital letters in your book? It was too aloof and abstract for me, though. I cannot even tell you what this book was really about.

... at least the cover is stunning, I suppose.

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### **Jess - The Tales Compendium says**

**In A Nutshell:** I'm sorry to say that I just couldn't connect with the story or it's characters.

For my full review, visit my blog:

<http://www.thetalescompendium.com/201...>

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### **Penni Russon says**

This is a lovely package, beautifully presented.

In terms of the story what resonated most was the powerful symbolic realm of the forest, and the sense of an

Australian girl trying to translate her intimate experience of a foreign landscape and the connectedness of all living things, when she is not connected to her own family. I admired Saliba's restraint, and the novel has lingered with me in a way it might not have if the story was more tightly observed. However I must admit to some frustration with the experience of reading this novel - I would have liked a little more texture - especially in terms of the relationships. I felt Saliba's beautiful words were merely brushing against the surface of things - an experience heightened by the idiosyncratic punctuation. However I think I would have LOVED this book in my mid to late teens, and especially the poetic ambiguity. A beautiful choice for the environmentally conscious teenaged girl.

Reading this reminded me of watching *The Ice Storm* - characters hopelessly adrift from one another in a landscape in which the built environment and the natural world press against each other. It struck me as a not very Australian form of storytelling, but I am not entirely sure what I mean by that.

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### **Romi (likes books) says**

Thank you to Penguin Books Australia for this review copy!

Alaska is such a beautiful novel, both design-wise and for the story it holds. I think it's more adult-esq in the YA range than any other books I had read, and still I do think it's higher YA now, so that makes me wonder how I would feel about it now, but I do know that I loved it, the poetical, beautiful writing, the story... it is a really special read. AND SUCH A NICE COVER.

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### **Jade Diamond says**

don't know what Alaska was meant to achieve but I certainly didn't get anything out of it. I guess it was meant to be lyrical and poetic – yet it was so aloof and abstract I cannot even tell you what this book was truly meant to be about.

[Read Full Review Here](#)

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### **Sarah says**

Beautiful read... absolutely beautiful and different.

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### **Liza says**

I love the cover of this book which is what attracted me to it in the first place. The author is an award winning YA author and teaches creative writing. This convinced me to purchase it for the school library but I am not sure whether I would recommend it to a student. It is very slow-moving, written 'poetically' and suffers from an annoying lack of capitals.

The central character, Mia, has just arrived in Alaska from Melbourne to stay with her sister Em as her



alcoholic mother undergoes rehab back in Australia. Mia hopes to resume the close relationship she had with Em as they coped with the repercussions of their mother's alcoholism and father's desertion. Em is now a young mother and prioritizes her son which Mia finds difficult to understand. At the heart of the narrative is a coming of age story as Mia, who has abandoned school before completing Year 12 in taking the trip to Alaska, finally faces up to her escapism and decides to return to Melbourne. I found it unrealistic and self-indulgent.

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## Emily says

What a lovely, delicate little book.

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## Skye says

*mia's heart made a sound that no one heard  
except for mia  
late one night when she woke from dreams into darkness.*

Sue Saliba's Alaska follows Mia, who has left home and her sick, alcoholic mother to go to Alaska and be with her sister that she was once so close to.

Alaska is told in gorgeous, lyrical episodic verse, free from constraints of some punctuation. While this aspect takes a while to appreciate, once accustomed to it, it only adds to the raw beauty of the writing.

The relationships between characters in Alaska are incredibly well-written, realistic, and explore different dynamics and their effects on other aspects of the characters' lives. The scenes in the novel where characters interact will take your breath away.

*it was as simple as a rifle and a man on a Saturday morning, and as crude. a full stop to everything.*

Evoked clearly and brilliantly even through third person is Mia's voice. Her tone is quietly intense, sometimes almost melancholy, and full of wonder. She's was an interesting and uniquely thoughtful character to read about.

Everything about this book is completely gorgeous. The prose, the story, the message; even the design. The cover is designed by Allison Colpoys, winner of an APA Design Award in 2011. The subtle things about the illustration are the best about it: the way the animals have the same, piercing eyes; the way the barcode on the back is worked into an illustration of a tree trunk; the way the headings within the work match the cover's typography.

Alaska is a quietly powerful story that could teach anyone lessons about the appreciating the world and the people around us. A definite must-read.

*that night as she lay beside ethan  
mia's heart made a sound that no one else heard.*

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